

92/65  
c

65

*The Bancroft Library*

University of California • Berkeley

REGIONAL ORAL HISTORY OFFICE



















Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

California Horticulture Oral History Series

F. Owen Pearce

CALIFORNIA GARDEN SOCIETIES AND HORTICULTURAL PUBLICATIONS, 1947-1990

With an Introduction by  
W. George Waters

Interviews Conducted by  
Adele and Lewis Lawyer  
in 1989

Edited by  
Suzanne B. Riess





F. OWEN PEARCE  
Orinda, California, 1990



## Owen Pearce

A memorial service will be conducted Sunday for Owen Pearce, a builder and horticulturist, who died February 26 from prostate cancer. He was 96 years old.

As a Bay Area builder, Mr. Pearce constructed several important buildings on the University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University campuses and public buildings in several cities.

He was also among the founders and the first president of the Strybing Arboretum Society, which supports the botanical garden at Golden Gate Park.

Mr. Pearce was born in 1897 in Brighton, Colo., and was educated in Denver, Spokane, Los Angeles and Corvallis, Ore., before graduating from the University of California at Berkeley in 1920.

For more than 20 years, he was employed in San Francisco by K. E. Parker Co., where he became chief engineer and partner. The company built the Alameda County Courthouse, the Women's City Club in Berkeley, the Oakland Naval Hospital and 60 hospitals.

On the Berkeley campus, it built the Women's Gymnasium, Hearst Hall and eight other structures.

In 1959, Mr. Pearce formed his own company with George Wagner in San Francisco, which did work at Stanford and Menlo Park.

An enthusiasm for the High Sierra and wildflowers led to his membership in the California Horticultural Society, of which he was president from 1953 to 1955. He became editor of its quarterly journal that became Pacific Horticulture in 1976.

Mr. Pearce is survived by his daughter, Barbara Ostrom of Discovery Bay, and four grandchildren.

The service will begin at 3 p.m. in the Peacock Room in Rossmoor.

Memorial contributions may be made to Guide Dogs for the Blind, P.O. Box 151200, San Rafael 94915-1200.





Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

\*\*\*\*\*

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and F. Owen Pearce dated 8 June 1990. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, University of California, Berkeley 94720, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user. The legal agreement with F. Owen Pearce requires that he be notified of the request and allowed thirty days in which to respond.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

F. Owen Pearce, "California Garden Societies and Horticultural Publications, 1947-1990," an oral history conducted in 1989 by Adele and Lewis Lawyer, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.

Copy no. 1



## Cataloging Information

PEARCE, F. Owen (b. 1897)

Horticulturist

California Garden Societies and Horticultural Publications, 1947-1990, xi, 88 pp., 1990.

Colorado background; architecture studies, UC Berkeley, and Bay Area building construction work, 1920-1964; founding member, California chapter of American Rhododendron Society and western chapter of American Rock Garden Society, Strybing Arboretum Society, California Horticultural Society, San Francisco Business Men's Garden Club; Victor Reiter and other plantsmen; editing the California Horticultural Society Journal; photography and mountaineering.

Introduction by W. George Waters, editor, Pacific Horticulture.

Interviewed 1990 by Adele and Lewis Lawyer. Edited by Suzanne B. Riess. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Donors to the F. Owen Pearce Oral History

The Regional Oral History Office on behalf of future researchers wishes to thank the following persons whose contributions made possible this oral history of F. Owen Pearce.

American Rock Garden Society, Western Chapter

California Horticultural Society

Oakland Business Men's Garden Club

David and Evelyne Lennette

San Francisco Business Men's Garden Club

Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust



Regional Oral History Office Interviews on  
Horticulture, Botany, and Landscape Design

Individual Memoirs

Bracelin, N. Floy, The Ynes Mexia Botanical Collections, 1982.

Constance, Lincoln, Versatile Berkeley Botanist: Plant Taxonomy and University Governance, 1987.

Lawyer, Adele and Lewis, Lawyers, Inc.: Partners in Plant Pathology, Horticulture, and Marriage, 1991.

McCaskill, June, Herbarium Scientist, University of California, Davis, 1989.

Pearce, F. Owen, California Garden Societies and Horticultural Publications, 1947-1990, 1990.

Roth, Lurline Matson, Matson and Roth Family History: A Love of Ships, Horses, and Gardens, 1982.

Scott, Geraldine Knight, A Woman in Landscape Architecture in California, 1926-1989, 1990.

Wieslander, A. E., California Forester: Mapper of Wildland Vegetation and Soils, 1985.

Multi-interviewee Volumes

Blake Estate Oral History Project, 1988.

California Women in Botany, 1987.

Thomas D. Church, Landscape Architect, Two volumes, 1978.

Lester Rowntree, California Native Plant Woman, 1979.

In Process

Isenberg, Gerda. Yerba Buena Nursery, California native plants.

Roderick, Wayne. UC Berkeley Botanical Garden, 1960-1976; East Bay Regional Parks Botanic Garden, 1976-1983.





F. OWEN PEARCE -- Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION by W. George Waters	i
INTERVIEW HISTORY by Adele and Lewis Lawyer and Suzanne Riess	iii
EDITOR'S NOTE	v
BRIEF BIOGRAPHY	vii
I FAMILY, CHILDHOOD, AND BUSINESS CAREER	1
Colorado Background	1
Mother, and the Boarding House	3
Schools and Teachers	6
Berkeley--Architecture Student	9
Marriage, 1922	12
Chief Estimator, K. E. Parker, Co. Construction	13
Parker, Steffens & Pearce, Construction Work, UC Berkeley	16
Julia Morgan, and Architecture Schoolmates	17
II HORTICULTURAL AVOCATIONS	19
Avocations--An Introduction	19
A First Garden, Orinda	20
Rhododendron Society	22
Rock Garden Society	26
San Francisco Business Men's Garden Club	27
Victor Reiter and Frank Reinelt	31
Sidney B. Mitchell, Cora Brandt, and the Strybing Arboretum	32
California Horticultural Society Meetings	35
Jim Roof and the Tilden Botanic Garden	36
Strybing Arboretum Society, Organization and Direction	41
Helen Crocker Russell Library	44
Editing <u>California Horticultural Journal</u>	45
F. Owen Pearce Award	61
Dunsmuir House, East Oakland	62
Oakland Spring Garden Show	64
Photographing--Mountains and Flowers	66
Mountaineering	69
Music	73
Family	75
TAPE GUIDE	80
APPENDICES	81
INDEX	86



## INTRODUCTION by W. George Waters

I first met Owen Pearce in 1973, soon after joining the California Horticultural Society. I had arrived from England in November 1972, and, as an enthusiastic gardener, joined the society and attended its lectures to learn about plants that flourished in the extraordinary climate of northern California. Owen was editor of the California Horticultural Journal and invited me to submit the text of my lecture, which I had developed as a slide lecture to promote the work of the recently formed Garden History Society, to the editorial board of the society for publication.

I suspect that during our discussions over this project Owen discovered my interest in printing and publication, for he suggested that I take on the task of distributing the journal--applying address labels, arranging copies in zip code order, and carting them to the post office in my pick-up truck. (I was doing garden maintenance at the time, and, gradually, a little design work--the reason for having the truck.) While this distribution duty scarcely encouraged my latent enthusiasm for the printed word--although I enjoyed for a moment the smell of ink at the printer's shop with each visit to collect copies of the journal--it did make friends of us, and I've been grateful ever since for that.

Owen Pearce's editorship of the Journal of the California Horticultural Society began with number one, volume twenty-five, issued in January 1964. With the formation in 1968 of the Pacific Horticultural Foundation the title became California Horticultural Journal and, in 1976, Pacific Horticulture. Owen helped with all these changes and continued as editor until about mid-1976, when he handed the editorship over to me, by then assistant editor. Owen was a member of the publications committee for several years prior to 1964, and so that phase of his service to the journal extended over a period of about sixteen years.

The transition to Pacific Horticulture, a larger format magazine with color pictures in every issue, was a period of great excitement. The format committee, as we called ourselves, met frequently, sometimes weekly, during 1975, to debate choices of paper, type faces, layout, and content. At first it was believed that the revised publication should, like its predecessors, contain only black and white illustrations. The cost of color printing was felt to be beyond our resources. However, this belief weakened as evidence of the true cost of printing in color accumulated, and it became clear that color was now essential to the



Under Owen's editorship, a few issues had burst out in color--he mentions this in his interview--but this was still the exceptional case, even in 1976. Cautiously, color was allocated to the cover and half a signature (eight pages in this case) inside. Page size in the new journal was increased to ten by seven, allowing bolder presentation of pictures. Good quality coated paper was chosen with dull rather than glossy surface to make reading easier on the eyes. Palatino type was chosen for use throughout the publication--easy to read, elegant, and conservative. (We were greatly helped in these decisions by Laurence Hyman, a book designer who had been working on the California Native Plant Society's publication Fremontia, and who Marge Hayakawa, Fremontia's editor, as well as a director of the Pacific Horticultural Foundation, introduced to the committee. His restrained style suited us. He remained on the masthead for ten years.)

I remember well the day in early January 1976 when Marge Hayakawa, Laurence Hyman, Owen Pearce, my wife Olive, and I were all gathered at the print shop in Emeryville to see the proof of the first issue. We all drank champagne together. Photographs were taken then--and later, when the printed copies were delivered to our volunteer mailing group, consisting of Olive and myself. [Ed's. note: see text, p. 48a] It was a signal moment: we knew at least that the first issue could be paid for with money loaned by three of our member societies, although we had no idea how the magazine would be supported thereafter.

That champagne toast was by no means the end of Owen's service to Pacific Horticulture. As Editor Emeritus he still serves by checking manuscripts and galleys and contributing articles occasionally. Although dedication of this sort was overawing to me as a newcomer--and Owen's dedication was obvious from the first--it is typical of the man. Owen is the most amiable and unassuming person of my acquaintance. He is, as the proverb has it, a great man who never feels great. His interests are wide and his accomplishments are many, as this account of them shows, but no one is more modest than he.

W. George Waters  
Editor, Pacific Horticulture

Berkeley, California  
November 30, 1990



## INTERVIEW HISTORY--Owen Pearce

We first knew of Owen Pearce through Dr. Panos D. Caldis, Director of Agricultural Research for Del Monte Corporation. Panos, our boss and very dear friend, had become a friend and admirer of Owen through membership in the San Francisco Businessmen's Garden Club and his position, along with Owen, on the board of Strybing Arboretum. We frequently heard Panos speak highly of Owen.

It was not until Panos's death in 1974, however, when both Lewis and Owen were pallbearers at his funeral, that we came to know Owen personally. It was around that time that we were first involved in local horticultural societies, and contacted him in the many lectures, meetings, and field trips associated with this mutual interest.

We have been impressed with the universal admiration and respect which Owen Pearce has earned from everyone with whom he has been associated. He is admired, first and most importantly, for his outgoing, but gentle personality, his sharp mind, and his keen sense of humor, and then for his multitude of talents: knowledge of plants and botanical nomenclature, talent for projecting himself and his subjects well at his many public presentations, organizational skills, writing and editorial talent, fine photography, and his diplomacy and sensitivity when dealing with the diverse personalities of his many personal contacts. Owen Pearce is, in short, a remarkable individual who has made an enormous contribution to the horticultural richness of the Bay Area.

When we suggested Owen as an ideal person for an oral history interview, Adele said, "He's such a wonderful person. I'd just love to interview him!" She was enormously pleased and surprised when we were given the opportunity to do so.

It was mid-April when we went to Owen's home in Rossmoor for his first interview. Although we had been there many years ago, we followed his telephone instructions, parked our car alongside his carport, and were amazed to see how the house was enfolded in the midst of the blooming rhododendrons which had grown enormously since our earlier visit. We walked up the path to his door with the house to our right, and a steep, grassy hill--mostly wild, but lined with plants at its base, on the left. Owen answered our ring, but rather than inviting us in, he spent a few minutes introducing us to some of his many shrubs, each of which reminded him of someone. There was even an iris plant reminding him of his friendship with Sydney Mitchell, and other plants which were named for Owen or his wife, Muriel. And within his outer courtyard were many potted plants representing a link with Victor Reiter and other friends and social contacts.





Inside, where we sat around Owen's dining room table spending pleasant hours listening to his life experiences, we saw the Steinway piano his mother gave him as a wedding present and had a chance to admire some of the many skillfully photographed black-and-whites he took during years of traveling in Europe and in the natural beauty of the Sierras. Since our only contact had been through horticultural interests and friends, we were really fascinated by the revelations of his other life, but when you stop and think about it, he had to be a businessman in order to participate in the Businessmen's Garden Club.

August 15, 1990  
Oakland, CA

Lawyers Inc.  
Lewis and Adele Lawyer



## EDITOR'S NOTE

Adele and Lewis Lawyer's many contributions to the history of horticulture in California are the subject of their own joint oral memoir, conducted in fall, 1989. These two plant pathologists, iris hybridizers, and gardeners extraordinaire--Lawyers Incorporated, as they call themselves--are committed to research, to scientific method, to completing a job once started, to beauty, in gardens, art and music, and to historical record. In their own editorial work for the American Iris Society, and other publications, they have as much as possible included the histories of individuals, in the interest of telling the story, and out of their own curiosity about what draws people to plants.

As Adele and Lewis Lawyer write in the preceeding Interview History, explaining their central role in the F. Owen Pearce Oral History, they seized happily on the opportunity to spend both structured formal and conversational informal time with a man they have known and admired for many years. The questions they put to Owen Pearce came out of real curiosity, and out of their historical instincts and abilities as good listeners. Their experience being interviewed by the Regional Oral History Office stood them in good stead. And in fact it was after they conducted the interviews with Mr. Pearce in April and May, 1990, that they took up the task of editing their own oral history interviews.

Everyone involved in Owen Pearce's oral memoir was an editor. Mr. Pearce, emeritus editor of Pacific Horticulture, had years of experience. He read through the interview transcript after its initial editing in the Regional Oral History Office and he made excellent changes and clarifications. An additional interview with Mr. Pearce, edited into the Lawyer/Pearce text, addresses specific issues of Mr. Pearce's editorship of the California Horticultural Society Journal, and Mr. Pearce also wrote expanded commentaries on issues that we felt had not received sufficient prior attention.

The F. Owen Pearce Oral History, inspired by the Lawyers and carried out by the Lawyers as volunteer interviewers, is the happy result of their willingness to plunge in and just do it. We thank them. For the funding to transcribe and complete the volume we thank the donors listed, and particularly David and Evelyn Lennette who introduced Adele and Lewis Lawyer to the Regional Oral History Office. The introduction was essentially the start of the California Horticulture Oral History Series.



What follows is the story of a hobbyist with an avocation that became a passion and really a second profession. F. Owen Pearce, hale and hearty at ninety-seven, has an enviable memory and an enviable enthusiasm for life.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews were persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of the director of The Bancroft Library.

Suzanne B. Riess  
Senior Editor

Regional Oral History Office  
Berkeley, California  
September 16, 1990



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name FRED OWEN PEARCE

Date of birth December 14, 1897 Birthplace Brighton, Colorado

Father's full name Fred Orion Pearce

Occupation Painting Contractor Birthplace Marysville, Missouri

Mother's full name May Eleanor Gibson Pearce

Occupation Boarding houses Birthplace Belle Plaine, Kansas

Your spouse Muriel Gooderham Castleman Pearce

Your children Barbara Lorraine Pearce Ostrom

Where did you grow up? Brighton, Colo., Corvallis, Ore., Berkeley, Calif.

Present community Walnut Creek, Calif.

Education Berkelen High School, 1916; A. B. School of Architecture, U.C. Berkeley, 192

Occupation(s) Building Contractor

Areas of expertise Main Office, San Francisco; constructed buildings

mainly in S. F. Bay area, but also in Sacramento, San Diego, Reno, Nev., Etc.

Other interests or activities Music -- Piano; Horticulture -- a dozen or so  
horticultural Societies and garden clubs; Editor, Calif. Horticultural Journal;  
Editor, Pacific Horticulture; active in Strybing Arboretum Society, San Francisco  
Speaker to garden clubs; have given many slide programs on Travel subjects.  
Organizations in which you are active California Horticultural Society; San Fran-  
cisco Business Man's Garden Club; Strybing Arboretum Society, Contra Costa  
Performing Arts Society





## I FAMILY, CHILDHOOD, AND BUSINESS CAREER

[Interview 1: April 11, 1990]##<sup>1</sup>

### Colorado Background

A. Lawyer: How did you get interested in horticulture?

Pearce: My mother had a garden. She talked about cosmos and snapdragons and pinks, things like that. But my strong interest didn't come till later.

My maternal grandfather was a farmer in Kansas, and my mother, when she was about ten or twelve years old, wrote an account of her experience coming west with her family. She was born in 1872 in eastern Kansas, Belle Plain, near Wichita. When she was about ten years old they moved. Her father had claimed land, 160 acres, a quarter section, as had his son, my mother's half-brother, near Greensburg, in western Kansas. So they moved their whole farm, all the wagons, horses, cattle, tools, household furniture, and everything else out about 250 miles, I guess.

I think there were six in my mother's family, plus the parents and uncles and cousins and aunts. I don't know how many wagons they had, but it was quite a trip. In one place they had to cross a river in full flood. What a thing that was! So, she experienced that westward trek--although not the far west. I got a Christmas card one time from my father, still living in Colorado, and printed on it was, "Greetings from the Far West." And here I was living in Orinda, California. [laughter]

My maternal grandfather's name was Abraham Gibson. So, my mother's maiden name was May Gibson. She and her sisters were thus "Gibson Girls," just when Gibson Girls were the rage, in the

---

<sup>1</sup>This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 80.



1890s, because of the beautiful pen-and-ink drawings of lovely young ladies by the famous artist Charles Dana Gibson.

My mother lived in Greensburg for about fifteen years. She finished high school, and taught school in a nearby town for a year. She visited a relative in the town of Brighton, Colorado, near Denver, and became acquainted there. She was interested in journalism. She wanted to be a newspaper writer. She had that ambition all her life, although she never succeeded in it, but she did get two years training in the little town newspaper. And then she met my father. They got married. I guess that ended that.

A. Lawyer: In those days, that was the end.

Pearce: Yes. But she was interested all her life in writing, and she wrote down everything of consequence. She had piles of little thoughts that she had put down, but nobody ever thought it was very good.

A. Lawyer: And what was your father like?

Pearce: My father had a private business of his own in this little town of Brighton. He was a painter and paper hanger. He travelled around the country. His father was a farmer. His father was born in 1849. My maternal grandfather, by the way, was born in 1820. And I have sat on his lap, and he was--the man on whose lap I sat--was born 170 years ago. That's quite a span of life.

My paternal grandfather was brought up in Illinois, and he told me once that he heard, as about a twelve-year-old or eleven-year-old, Abe Lincoln talk, one of his debates with Douglas. That's kind of interesting. He came west to Colorado and had a farm, first in the Brighton area, then he went further to western Colorado. There is a town named Fruita there, in the Grand Junction area. He purchased an orchard there, but he didn't stay there. He came back to Brighton, and he stayed on his farm until he died.

My paternal grandfather died at eighty-eight, and my maternal grandfather died at eighty-nine.

A. Lawyer: That was good for those days when you didn't have good medical care.

Pearce: That's right. A healthy farm life, I think, probably did it. My father lived till ninety, my mother till ninety-three. So, the genes were there.

A. Lawyer: What about you? Where were you born?



Pearce: I was born in this little town of Brighton, about twenty miles north of Denver, in 1897. Got a cute story about that. About five or six years ago I went to a Sear's store to buy something. When I went to the counter and submitted a check the girl wanted to see my driver's license to check the identity. I pulled it out and showed it to her. She said, "This is wrong."

"My driver's license is wrong?" I asked her, "What's wrong about it?"

She said, "Look at the date of your birth: 12-14-97." I said, "What's wrong about that?" She says, "Ninety-seven isn't here yet." In another seven years I'll be legitimate. [laughter]

#### Mother, and the Boarding Houses

A. Lawyer: So, you went to school there in Brighton, too?

Pearce: I went to school in Brighton through the fourth grade, and in Denver through half the sixth grade. When I was ten years old, my father and mother were divorced, and my mother was given full care of the children--I had a younger brother and a sister. She took us to Denver. She didn't know what she was going to do to make a living. She started a boarding house, just to keep her head above water, but we were too close to my father to suit her. She had a cousin in Spokane, Washington, and he told her that there was a probability that she could do something there, so we moved to Spokane in 1910, in January--the worst time of year you could possibly travel, particularly with three children.

We were in a regular sleeping car. In southern Idaho we got snow-bound for three days. Of course, the railroad furnished food, but my mother had brought enough food to carry us through, and I can still smell stale bananas. When we got to Umatilla, where we had to change trains to the north, to Spokane, we found that there was a washout due to the storm between Umatilla and Spokane. Here was my mother, stuck with three children in an unknown town at midnight. The station master was very helpful. He called around at that time of night and found a place, a room, and they took us in for the night. People are nice, they really are. And, there was a young lady who was stranded also, and she came too. They had the room for us and put us up--five of us.

Anyway, we made it the next day to Spokane. After going around to the real estate offices, my mother found a suitable house, and had enough money to pay for the furniture--very nice



furniture in this house where somebody was leaving it all behind for some reason or another, I don't know now--and she started another boarding house. My mother ran boarding houses after that, even though she tried to get away from it, and took lessons in care of the hair--beauty shop, and so forth. We used to get manicures regularly. [laughter]

A. Lawyer: Quite a contrast to being a gardener, when you always have dirty fingernails.

Pearce: Yes! So, that was the story up till the time I graduated in 1920.

A. Lawyer: Which college did you go to?

Pearce: I went to U.C. My mother--one of the reasons I think that she divorced my father was that he wasn't ambitious enough, and she wanted her children to get the best possible education. At first, she thought of Denver, but that wasn't satisfactory. She had discovered that there was a university in Spokane--Gonzaga--but that didn't amount to anything once we got there.

We travelled down to Los Angeles for nine months. She thought she'd go into the real estate business there. When that didn't work out, her sister, who lived in Corvallis, Oregon, urged her to come there. Her oldest son was going to Oregon Agricultural College, now Oregon State College, and her other son was in high school there. We stayed in Corvallis for two years, where I was in high school.

But on the way from Spokane to Los Angeles we had stopped in San Francisco and toured Berkeley. And when she saw the University of California she said to herself, "That's the place for my children." So, after two years in Corvallis, we came down to Berkeley, and I have been in the Bay Area ever since. We came here in 1914.

A. Lawyer: Certainly she was a strong woman who saw that you got an education.

Pearce: She was. As a boy I was very much of a loner. Although I had friends and so forth, I could take care of myself and interest myself for some reason or another. While in school I was a little bit ashamed of Mother running a boarding house. In retrospect, however, I think she was just absolutely terrific. And she worked hard, and I helped her, and my sister helped her a lot. I still remember the boarding house in Berkeley. There were seven rooms, I think.

A. Lawyer: Where was it? What street was it on?





Pearce: On Channing Way, between Telegraph and Bowditch. There were several three-story shingled houses there. She stayed in that same place for seven or eight years.

She had about fifteen boys to start with. After three or four years she changed to girls. Boys are a little more demanding, a little more work. The girls would do some of the chores themselves and the boys wouldn't. But every morning, after the boys had left to go to school, she would go upstairs, do the beds, change the sheets once a week, I think, and do the washing in the tub with the old scrub board. The strength it took to do that, I've admired so much ever since then. I just appreciate it so much.

A. Lawyer: She didn't do meals, too, did she?

Pearce: Oh yes, yes. And she had outside boarders come in, so that she usually served about twenty meals, including lunch, for twenty-five dollars a month room and board.

L. Lawyer: Now, getting back to your boyhood, you were before automobiles. You saw automobiles coming in, just like I did, because I'm ten years younger than you, and even I saw horses running around.

Pearce: Well, my father had a horse and a--what do you call it?--we called it a horse and buggy. It had a kind of a platform in back like a pick-up, a very small one. He'd use that in business, carrying paints and things around in it. I remember a horse, a white horse, very distinctly.

We used to go from Brighton to Denver on picnics. Our mother and father sat in the front seat and we three children would be in the back, with our legs hanging over, driving twenty miles to Denver for a picnic, and back in the same day.

A. Lawyer: Lewis always said there was one advantage to having horses for the milkman. He puts the milk bottle on the porch, and then the horse would go on by itself. You didn't have to have another driver there. The horse knew the route. So that's one advantage.

Pearce: They're pretty smart, there's no question. I remember one time. We had a barn in the back yard to take care of the horse and the buggy. We had to go in an alley back of the main street, and my dad stopped the horse near the street to go into the barn for something. For some reason the horse started to move, and there was a pretty good-sized rock close by, and the buggy, with me in it, tipped over when it hit the rock. I yelled. I wasn't hurt at all, but I thought I might have been. Gee, my dad came running.



Oh, did he get mad. He got in that buggy, and he started to whip that horse. I said, "Oh, don't do that."

### Schools and Teachers

A. Lawyer: It's funny, the things you remember.

Pearce: Yes. We went to school, as I said, for the first four grades in Brighton. I remember two or three of the school teachers. One of them was Miss Youngclaus. I remember when my father was kind of an emcee of a skit in a vaudeville thing--amateur vaudeville that they put on in the opera house in Brighton--he was naming some citizens in a humorous way and he mentioned Miss Youngclaus, although he called her Miss Youthful Fingernails! [laughter]

A. Lawyer: No wonder you remember her name so well.

Pearce: There was a Miss Swope. I think she was probably the most helpful, as far as I was concerned. I didn't need much help in school. I think I was pretty bright. They used to say that there was one girl in the classroom brighter than I was. There was always that push behind me, not by anybody else, just by myself. I did my best. I wasn't trying to be the best, I just wanted to do my own best.

L. Lawyer: How were the schools different in Denver than in Brighton?

Pearce: There wasn't very much difference. Brighton was a town of about twelve hundred, I think, something like that, at that time. It was a good school, and I don't remember any difference in the style of classes or anything. I do remember the first teacher I had in Denver. (The teacher, of course, taught all subjects in those days. We didn't have specialized teachers.) Her name was Miss Royal. She was kind of a dumpy little woman, but, oh, she was nice. She kind of specialized in geography. Maybe I was more interested in geography, I don't know.

I still retain so many things that she taught us about different places. She was very conscientious, for instance, about proper pronunciations of foreign cities, foreign countries. Ever since then, wherever I travelled, whenever I talked to people, I tried to pronounce the names properly. I doubt that she was always right, but I've had that urge ever since. That was in the fifth grade.



In the sixth grade we had a teacher in grammar. That was, to me, one of the most important classes I ever attended. She had a way of dealing with us that made everything go right to home so that we remembered it. I think it's done me a lot of good, particularly in the later years when I was editor of Cal Hort Journal. I had to edit articles and go back to the grammar and the punctuation and so forth. I've forgotten this teacher's name, but I do remember the drilling that we had and the parsing of the sentences. I don't know whether they still do that or not.

L. Lawyer: To me it's interesting the way you played then. I think that the most important things are the things you do yourself--no television.

A. Lawyer: It develops you.

Pearce: Well, I was never really an athletic boy. My brother was a top athlete. He won his letter in football at Cal. He was understudy to Brick Muller. Brick Muller played every game as long as he was playing, and my brother never had a chance. It wasn't till the last year of college, after Brick Muller graduated, that my brother had a chance. And then he broke his shoulder in the first game.

I never had that ability. My brother was a great half-miler, he was very good at the half-mile. I tried it once when I went to college. We had to try out for some special event as a freshman. I started out to run as fast as I could in the half-mile, and there were these fellows going around, just passing me as if I was walking. So, I gave up on any competition like that. But, I had energy, and I love to hike, and that stood me in good stead later in life.

We did play games as boys. "Andy I Over." Do you know that? We lived right next to a little warehouse. And somehow or other we'd throw a ball over the warehouse, and we'd yell "Andy I Over," and the fellow on the other side was supposed to look for it and catch it no matter where it landed, or something like that.

L. Lawyer: We used to do that, though I don't think we called it that, throwing the ball over the house to the people on the other side. If they didn't catch it, they were out.

Pearce: That was about the idea. "Run Sheep Run," I remember that very well.

A. Lawyer: We played that, even in San Francisco. And "One Foot Off the Gutter" we played.



Pearce: Recess, summer vacations. Gee, they were nice and long. It seemed like it until the end. We went barefoot in Brighton. We never wore shoes from the end of school till the beginning of school in the fall. We had wooden sidewalks--planks--and every once in a while we'd get a splinter in our foot, or something like that. Of course, we played marbles, and as a result my mother always had a china egg handy to darn the knees of my black wool stockings. Does that sound familiar?

L. Lawyer: Yes, that sounds familiar.

Pearce: As boys we wore knickers, and had long, black stockings with a garter belt, and never thought anything about it.

L. Lawyer: Did you have--like we graduated into long pants when we were going in the sixth or seventh grade?

Pearce: Yes, at fourteen years old I changed to long pants, and boy, was that a celebration on my fourteenth birthday. They don't wear knickers at all anymore, do they? I remember my mother--oh, she was darning socks all the time for my brother, for myself, and even my sister.

A. Lawyer: Big change now with nylon fabrics. Socks never wear out.

L. Lawyer: Where were you in high school? What city was your high school?

Pearce: I graduated from grammar school in the short period we were down in Los Angeles. I'd been in Spokane for almost two years. Gee I felt homesick down in Los Angeles with no friends or anything else. I graduated from the eighth grade from the central school there on Pico Street, I think. A big crowd of about fifteen hundred graduates in one class, and I felt lost.

I went from there, in the high ninth, up to Corvallis, Oregon. We were there for almost two years. I enjoyed that little town immensely. That was really nice. My cousin was the president of the student body when I got to Corvallis, so I had a good introduction there. He belonged to a debating society, the Websterian Society. And as a sophomore mostly--I had skipped a half-year of school, and all together, I skipped a whole year of school--in this Websterian Society we practiced Robert's Rules of Order, and had to give speeches, each one of us, and learned to debate, and it was just a nice thing.





Berkeley, Architecture Student

Pearce: I had one year to go when we left Corvallis to come down to Berkeley. And again, that was one of the lonesome periods, that first six months in Berkeley. I had known everybody in Corvallis in the class, in the school, almost everybody. I think there were over a hundred in my graduating class in Berkeley High. That first six months in Berkeley, I was just completely lost. And I'll never forget the sensation--. After Christmas we came back from vacation to start school again, and a fellow came up and said, "Hi, Pearce." What a wonderful feeling that was! And I enjoyed my last year-and-a-half of Berkeley High very much, very much.

In those days, of course, it was almost automatic entry into UC Berkeley. No problems of racism or selection. It cost you about thirty-five or forty dollars to register, and that was it for the year, outside of the books you had to buy. What a wonderful opportunity for education compared to what the boys and girls have now.

A. Lawyer: Did you know what you were going to major in right away?

Pearce: That's kind of a cute story. My mother had determined that--not determined, but she liked the subject of architecture. When I was down in Los Angeles, I had to take a course in mechanical drawing. I had to get a little set of instruments--dividers, compass, straight edge, and so forth. We found it second-hand, and it cost fifteen dollars. She said, "Well, I'll buy that for you if you'll be an architect."

That set my sights right there. I didn't know anything about architecture really until I came to Berkeley High and registered there. The secretary was a very competent person--Miss Percival, I remember her very well. She analyzed my previous schooling, and she said that Corvallis High was a backward school, and there were courses that Berkeley High required that I hadn't had. She set me back a whole year. She made me graduate by normal time, which was all right.

I stayed in Berkeley High two years. I made fast friends there and two or three lifelong chums through college and all the days of hard work, through thick and thin--that's the way it should be. But, I've outlived them all. [laughter]

There were a couple of things at Berkeley High that I enjoyed very much. Chemistry I enjoyed very much, and mathematics. This secretary, because I was going into architecture, insisted that I



had to take French. I'd had no idea that you should, and I'm glad that she did. I had two years of French at Berkeley High, and drawing. I'm not a real artist, but I have some ability, and it started in Berkeley High.

So, I entered into architecture at Cal. The first year was nothing very technical in the way of architecture. We had to take engineering, mathematics. We had to take a few general cultural subjects, like Egyptology--the most boring course I ever took. I don't remember anything about it, but, we had to do that.

The course work in architecture didn't begin until the sophomore year. But as freshman we had to take the history of architecture by John Galen Howard, and I feel so fortunate to have been able to work under his influence. I didn't have any classes with him, but he was a great man, and he influenced everybody under him, the whole school.

When it came to the sophomore year, we started to really study architecture, and continue this drawing and watercolor work. All architectural work had to be done up carefully, and many times there were architectural sketches which had to be either pen and ink or pencil or watercolor. Gee, I just loved it, although some of the others were real fine artists.

One classmate, Gerry "Fitz" Fitzgerald--he could draw anything, perfectly. We had a poster one time of one of our little entertainments by the architectural group in the building there. He had cartoons of all the different ones in the group, and he had me, pictured with the little twirl of hair up on the top. He did it perfectly. Everybody knew who it was! Well, things like that I couldn't do. I learned to appreciate and enjoy them, and through that whole course of architecture, it enlarged my cultural being, and it's influenced me all my life. I enjoy art and the things that go with it.

We also had the hard, down-to-earth subjects of mathematics, engineering design, and that can get pretty tough, particularly in engineering. The engineers in the junior courses and senior courses had to have a lot of technical knowledge in mathematics and other subjects behind them. Most of the women in architecture hadn't had that. I had. But they didn't go into it necessarily for the architects, who had special classes on those subjects separate from the engineers. However, during the war, World War I, the professor who taught those subjects for the architects, especially, was a colonel, and he was overseas, so we had to take regular courses with the engineers.



We got by, but one particularly difficult course--. We were mixed in with the engineers, and when the midterm results came out, I remember I think I got about fifty out of a hundred, and the girls in the course got probably thirty-five out of a hundred. We got together and we went around as a whole unit to the professor and explained our problems. He said, "Don't you worry. As of now, your average is above that of the class average." That encouraged us, he passed us! But that's just kind of what we were up against.

In the School of Architecture, we were in a single building along Euclid Avenue--you know where that is--and it goes up the hill. That was a home almost. At times we did work all night. It was a wonderful course for friendship, and everything else. It influenced all of us for the rest of our lives. There were twelve in my senior class. Ten years later there were two hundred in the senior class.

L. Lawyer: But you knew all the professors.

Pearce: We knew the professors quite intimately--there were only four or five of them. In fact, one of my classmates, Elah Hale, married our senior architectural professor, W.C. Hays. He was forty and she was about twenty-two. They lived happily, and she was a great artist in her own right. So, it made no difference. But, that was typical of the friendship we had there.

I realized before the end that I didn't have that genius that I thought good architects required--you had to be a genius in art development, and so forth, and I just didn't have it in me. I realized it. I was okay in other respects. When I got out I worked with this Mr. Hays for two weeks in his office. Then I got the offer of a job with a contractor whose name I had been given, and he gave me a job as a time-keeper. In two years I was the head estimator, and in another fifteen years I was a partner in the firm. So, that was the right thing, I did the right thing.

And I have always been a pretty good draftsman because of what I'd done in school, and I appreciated architecture, and I was friends to many of my classmates who became top architects later on. It was a course that was just wonderful for me.

L. Lawyer: Did you have to take any biological courses in architecture?

Pearce: No, but I did like chemistry in high school. That was an eye-opener, a real awakener to some of the realities of science. I had taken physics. That was required for engineering and all that kind of stuff. But, chemistry, I had to take that in high school. We had one of the best teachers I ever had in any course. He was



a terrific teacher, and I enjoyed chemistry so much that when I went to college I took Chemistry 1A and 1B there, although it wasn't required at all--it was an elective course. And, I followed that until they got into organic chemistry--that was out of my realm completely, so I didn't follow through on that. Otherwise, I think almost every course that I took was good. Took some French.

L. Lawyer: Did you happen to have Joel Hildebrand in chemistry?

Pearce: In chemistry Hildebrand was the lecturer, and then he had assistant professors, or even--one fellow who was in my class was so brilliant that he led the laboratory sections, a man named [William Francis] GIAUQUE. Later he got a Nobel Prize for work in low temperature chemistry. I got to know his wife very well. She was interested in rhododendrons. What a character she was! So, I became friends with her husband, too. Slightly--he was too busy. But, generally speaking, no biological work.

#### Marriage, 1922##

L. Lawyer: I guess that covers Cal pretty well.

A. Lawyer: Let's go on to your career, meeting your wife, and all that.

Pearce: About a year after I graduated--I graduated in 1920--about a year after that I met my wife, Muriel [Castleman]. I told you that I lived on Channing Way, and her family moved in next door. She was "the girl next door." I still tell how I'd get out and water my lawn, and she'd get out and water her lawn, and the grass was greener right near the property line. Over on the other sides it never got watered!

My wife was very proud of her mother's family. My wife's maiden name was Castleman. Her father was born in Canada and so was her mother. Her mother was born in Toronto. Gooderham was her mother's maiden name, and the Gooderham family was a very, very prominent family in Toronto. Her grandfather was the president of a big bank system there. His sons took over after he passed on. I went back there two or three times in later life, after I retired, and I met many scions of the family, including my wife's aunt. I was impressed. It was a real fine family. The Castleman family was good, too, but that family didn't have the enthusiasm of following up their relatives like we did with the Gooderham family.





Anyway, it was a good relationship. We had a very, very happy life together. She was mostly a wife, and that was it. She had artistic ability. That little carving you might see there, she did that. And this lamp around the corner she carved. That's really quite a piece of art carving in that chair behind the piano. She did that carving, too. She made a wonderful home for me.

I had been working for about a year, year-and-a-half, before I met her. We became engaged in 1921, in the fall of 1921, planned to marry the next summer. I remember we were making all kinds of plans for a wonderful Christmas, our first Christmas really together, and the week before Christmas the climax came regarding some work I had to do on the job we were building in San Diego. (We built a three-story, 100 by 200 or 300 foot warehouse for the Navy down there. I detailed all the steel, reinforcing steel. Let me tell you, that was a job!) There were things that came up, and I couldn't do it in the office.

So, the week before Christmas I was sent down there to try to fix that up. "Oh, you'll be back next week, there's no problem," said my boss. I stayed there for four months and missed Christmas altogether with my wife. And that Christmas was the loneliest day I ever had in my life, I'll tell you that. But it was a good experience, very good experience.

#### Chief Estimator, K.E. Parker, Co. Construction

Pearce: When I came back in June, I guess it was May or June, I found that I had been made the chief estimator. The man who had trained me as an estimator had quit to go into business himself. I replaced him, and I still don't know why my boss depended on me--you know, that's an important thing, that's what makes or breaks things. That's where you make the money or lose it. So, I managed to come through all right.

A. Lawyer: What was the name of your firm?

Pearce: The name was K.E. Parker Company--Kingsbury Eastman Parker. He was a very determined, sometimes almost heartless character. He could be--I don't know just exactly what word to describe it. When I first knew him, during that first two or three years, he had one of the vilest vocabularies I've ever heard. He had a stenographer in there for dictating letters to, and a phone call would come in, and he'd start swearing over the phone. He'd say, "You get out of here!" to her. He had a reputation of being a



chiseler in business--he would do dirty tricks. His wife was a Christian Scientist, and inside of five years, he was a changed man. I think he had been married four, five years when I knew him, and inside of ten years after the marriage, he was an entirely different man.

When I first joined the company, he was financed by a big construction concern, a pile-driving concern, Healy-Tibbetts Company. They bore down on him, they put the thumbs on him, and he had to perform. So, he kept up this reputation as a chiseler, and so forth. But, about five years after I started, he bought them out, and became his own man. He just changed like that. Nobody would believe it. It took years to overcome his first reputation. But, she had changed him, and after the first five years, I never heard him utter an obscene word. He'd swear, but not really, not bad. He had an ability, no question about that.

As I say, I was trained first as an estimator--reading plans, estimating quantities. I designed a couple of buildings as an architect, both engineering and architecture. One of them has been torn down since. That kind of hurt because although it wasn't too much of a building, it was one that I had done, and it was right in the way of Moscone Center, so it went.

A. Lawyer: And your firm, was it in San Francisco?

Pearce: In San Francisco. The office was on a little, one block-long street called South Park. It ran from Second to Third Street, between Bryant and Brannan. Does that locate it for you fairly well? About a block and a half from Third and Townsend Station--I don't think that exists anymore, does it?

Both: I think so, I think it does.

Pearce: I guess it does.

At that time, in that area--well, there were quite a few Caucasians living on South Park, and it was gradually made into a Japan town. So when I went down to Market Street--I always went down at noontime just to eat a sandwich, and I also went down just to relieve the work pressure--on the streetcar coming back I'd say, "South Park, please." And, the conductor would say, "Oh, Nagasaki, huh!"

I used to work sometimes till eleven, twelve o'clock in the evening. Usually would bring work home, but every once in awhile, we'd have to work in the office. I'd walk down Second Street, down to the Bay Terminal--at that time the Bay Terminal was there --never thinking about any danger walking around the streets. You



wouldn't dare to do that now, although South Park has become pretty well-known for nice things, restaurants and things like that.

A. Lawyer: It's changing now.

Pearce: But, originally, South Park was the height of fashion. Back in the 1850s and '60s, one man built that up, and the wealthy people owned it. So, it has a history of its own.

But, professionally, I did all the estimating work alone to start with. I still marvel at what I accomplished. For instance, I don't know if you know the two buildings opposite the state capitol in Sacramento--they're classical buildings with domes, up to the north of the capitol. They're very classic types of buildings. We built those, and I had to detail all the reinforcing steel. That's the first job I had when I came back from San Diego. Gee, that's a boring job. But, it had to be done.

And this warehouse in San Diego--I won't go into the details of it, but that was a very unusual type of warehouse, and the reinforcing was very complicated. I had to detail bent bars like this for a beam, I had to get the exact length, exactly what kind of bends were on it, the dimensions and everything. And it had to be right. Hundreds of pages of details. I don't know how I did it now.

We did all the installation of those bars, too. Later, the steel companies took over all of that, including the installation, so we would just get bids for reinforcing steel in place. So, we didn't have to that. But for about five or six years, I guess, it was one of the big jobs, and I worried all the time for fear of mistakes. One time I was told that I was ten tons short of the correct amount of steel. It worried me to beat the band until I detailed it, and it came out the way I figured it. And at the end of the job, the supplier said they had to buy ten tons additional. I don't know how it happened, but the company pulled out ten tons from their final bill! [laughs] Anyway, I'm just trying to show you how difficult that work is.

L. Lawyer: Where were you living at that time?

Pearce: The first year, my wife and I lived in an apartment house down in the Elmwood District at Ashby Avenue and College, right down there. Then we built a house off of Chabot Road on Chabot Court.

A. Lawyer: So then you had to commute over to the city?



Pearce: I had to commute regularly on the ferry--the Key System. In retrospect, that combination was a whole lot better. I usually found sitting room on the trains and on the boat. The boat was a wonderful thing. In the morning I would read the newspaper while crossing, which was good. Then, in the evening there would be a group of us engineers and/or architects. Maybe sometimes two or three, sometimes ten or twelve gathered out on the front of the ferry boat for fifteen or twenty minutes. I made acquaintances there that lasted.

Parker, Steffens and Pearce, Construction Work, UC Berkeley

Pearce: During the years, we did an awful lot of really pretty important work. Ten buildings on the University campus: Sproul Hall, the women's gymnasium, Hearst Hall, and Warren Hall--that's down at the west end, near University and Oxford. That was a six story building, I believe, a big one. The women's dormitory [Stern Hall] up near the Greek Theater on Northside, we built that. Was that before or after the war? Probably after, on account of getting materials, which were scarce during the war years. That was difficult. But very few of the jobs were losing--we did lose money on a few. We also built the infirmary, and Haviland Hall.

A. Lawyer: Did you know Bob Ratcliff?

Pearce: Bob Ratcliff? We built the twelve-story [bank] building on Shattuck Avenue at Center Street, a steel and brick building. I'm trying to think, it was Bob Ratcliff's father [Walter Ratcliff] who was the architect for it. Later on, I knew Bob and Evelyn. We did some work for him, too.

A. Lawyer: He did a lot of buildings on the campus, as well.

Pearce: Yes. They were wonderful people. I liked them very much, always did like them. Evelyn is a landscape architect.

Later, I became a partner in the firm, and we changed the name to Parker, Steffens, and Pearce. We built our office building on South Park, as I said, and it was two stories. But on each side of us were just one story warehouses or residences. You can still go by on South Park--I haven't done it for three or four years now--but, we had Parker, Steffens, and Pearce painted on the side wall. Big letters. It's been painted over, but you can still see it. Steffens and I were very proud men when we first saw that sign. "There's our name!"





Julia Morgan, and Architecture Schoolmates

Pearce: Through building the women's gymnasium, we got acquainted with Julia Morgan. She admired our work very much and favored us in later times. We had a man named George Loorz who was a timekeeper for us on that job at the women's gymnasium. He was so good that she hired him away from us and put him in charge of all construction for her at San Simeon. George Loorz was in charge there. She appreciated us. She was quite a woman, Julia Morgan. George, later, after he finished San Simeon for her, went into business for himself. Formed one of the biggest national firms. Made quite a name for himself. Julia Morgan gave us chances to bid on several jobs, and gave us several jobs without bidding.

We built what was then the Women's City Club of Berkeley. (Now it's the Berkeley City Club and it's coeducational.) And we built the Y.W.C.A. residence building on Sacramento Street in San Francisco for her, not too far from the Fairmont Hotel up on Nob Hill. We revised the front of the Hearst Building at Third and Market. It was a small job, but a very intricate and particular job.

We had a lot of experience with Julia Morgan, and a few years back, there was an article in the San Francisco Chronicle about a woman who was writing up the story of Julia Morgan [Sara Boutelle]. There was a paragraph in it that said that if anybody might have had experience with Miss Morgan or something, this lady would welcome information. So, I wrote her a letter, and told that we'd built her buildings. She invited me to lunch at the Women's City Club one day, and I had a most pleasant lunch with her, and I gave her several little stories about Miss Morgan.

There's a book about Miss Morgan by this lady--I don't know whether you've ever seen it or not. It's a big book, a couple hundred pages, I guess, with pictures of many of her jobs. Of course, our jobs were pictured there, too. One thing leads to another, you know what I mean?

L. Lawyer: What was Julia Morgan like personally?

Pearce: She was quite retiring. She wasn't forceful, intruding on people. She was very slightly-built, but a strong woman. She had a tremendous lot of energy, and she wore out personal secretaries. She actually wore them out! In designing a building like the Women's City Club, before it was put out for figures, she had every detail in her mind. It was like Mozart writing a concerto, or something. Before he started it was all in his mind. And it would just zoom like that. I have read about the experiences of



people that saw him doing that, and it's there. It's just surprising.

L. Lawyer: There's a computer up there [in the mind].

Pearce: That's what it is.

Miss Morgan was the first woman to be admitted to the Beaux Arts School in Paris [Ecole des Beaux Arts]. Fifteen or twenty years ago, now, they had an exhibition of her drawings, which she made at the Beaux Arts School, down at the Oakland Museum. Beautiful work, you just can't imagine.

This makes me think of a cute little story. You know, students of architecture, and architects themselves, had to make tremendous drawings--the size of this table and sometimes bigger --detailing the whole building, all the lines, and so forth. And the architects' idea of Hades was finding a mistake in that. They had to erase the whole darn thing, which had been inked on tracing cloth, move it over, and redraw it, one-eighth to the inch.

L. Lawyer: That would be a bad dream.

Pearce: It sure would!

Through the years I got acquainted with quite a few of the architects. Some of my classmates were prominent ones. Bill Wurster, who headed the School of Architecture later on, was a senior when I was a sophomore, so I got to know him pretty well. The architect for the Ahwahnee Hotel, Ted Spencer, was a senior. His wife, who was Jeanette Dyer, Jeanette Spencer, she was in that same class, and she had a great artistic ability and she did all the interior fixtures at the Ahwahnee. So, they're completely responsible for that. Those contacts through the years--it's just wonderful to remember.



## II HORTICULTURAL AVOCATIONS

[Interview 2: May 8, 1990]##

Avocations--An Introduction

Pearce: I have here reminders of some of the different things that I've done: the business career and the education; the avocations, music, photography, and hiking and mountaineering, gardening.

L. Lawyer: Where do you want to start?

Pearce: I don't know how many of these are important for gardening and horticulture. I think mountaineering was really the start because I got interested in hiking, and I used to climb Mount Diablo three or four times every summer.

In 1918 I went on my first trip up in the Sierra. A friend and I went to Yosemite and what happened on the way up, that would be part of the story, wouldn't it? Well, it's just kind of interesting to show how difficult it was to travel in those days, and how we did it.

Our trip was at the end of the season, just after Labor Day, and we'd been working in an office in San Francisco all summer. We didn't have much money yet--we had to save it for college. We took a river boat from San Francisco to Stockton, and we were going to sleep out on the deck with our blanket roll. We got on the boat and there were a lot of Chinese aboard. We had visions of tong wars [laughs], so we went to see if there was a stateroom, and there was one stateroom left with two bunks, and they charged us fifty cents a night for each.

We got up to Stockton, and we were going to take the bus from Stockton to Yosemite. We found that after Labor Day the bus only ran to Groveland, and then it was a forty mile hike to Yosemite. Well, we were in Stockton already, so we started out. We took the bus to Groveland and started hiking. After about five miles, a



couple from Los Angeles picked us up in their small car. They didn't have any room in the car--the back seat was full of camping stuff--so they said, "Hop on the running board and we'll take you as far as we can." And we went to Yosemite on the running board all the way. [laughter]

L. Lawyer: That was better than walking.

Pearce: That was better than walking, yes. On that trip I got acquainted somewhat with the flowers. I noticed one that particularly interested me. I've forgotten now whether we had a camera--I think I did have a camera. It was a very cheap camera, not a Brownie box camera, maybe a little better than that.

Anyway, a couple of years later we went up to Tahoe and climbed Pyramid Peak, and hiked around there. And in 1924 I took my first pack trip up into the High Sierra. A friend of mine had been working as a helper on pack trips up in Giant Forest. He had a spattering of knowledge of the flowers. We went through a field of flowers, and I remember it was just absolutely gorgeous. I didn't realize that I did love flowers so much. I had a garden, I'd read a little about gardening, but not very deeply. So, the photography and the gardening hobby were a result of those first three trips.

#### A First Garden, Orinda

Pearce: As far as the gardening and horticulture is concerned, I built our new house in Orinda. Did you ever see that?

L. Lawyer: Yes, I've seen it.

Pearce: I had to do some landscaping.

A. Lawyer: How much acreage did you have?

Pearce: Three-quarters of an acre, but about a third of it, at least, was on a very steep hillside, and I just let that go wild, although I planted a few native plants down there. I thought that I would get native plants altogether. A friend of mine who was a landscape architect who specialized in native California plants drew up a plan for me.

A. Lawyer: Who was that?





Pearce: I don't remember his name. He drew up a good plan for me, and I used it. My main idea was to plant the native plants, and just a lawn out in front and back, and then sit back and enjoy it, do nothing.

When I moved out there, I became acquainted with Harold and Marjorie Manor, my neighbors--I don't know whether you've heard of them. They belonged to three different garden clubs. They had a beautiful garden there, and they had quite a few natives, ceanothus and so forth. They got me into the Cal Hort Society, and they got me into the Alameda County Floral Society. That was quite a powerful society, met in Oakland in the evening. It was a really good thing. Harry Butterfield was one of the leaders at one time, and Charlie Phillips--I don't know whether you know him or not. He had tremendous exhibits in the Spring Garden Shows. Remember them? Those were wonderful shows. And the San Francisco Business Men's Garden Club. Harold got me into all three of them. And that was my undoing.

For some reason or another, after a year or so each club got me into the rotation for officer, and I eventually became president of each one. And I was studying all kinds of flowers. I never did take any official courses, any regular courses in horticulture--just studying and hearing lectures and being acquainted with people who talked about flowers. I guess I have a retentive memory, and the result has come through, that I've been able to do quite a bit in the way of horticulture.

A. Lawyer: And you know all the botanical terms, too.

Pearce: Yes. I read every book I could get, and I subscribed to several magazines. But after three or four years--I remember one in particular, I liked it to start with, but every year the same rigmarole, year after year. You know, pleasing the readers. Even Sunset. I took Sunset for several years, and I got tired of it because it was just more or less repetition. And new stuff I was getting out of newer books.

I started my garden with planting a lot of these natives, and that worked fine. But around the house I wanted something a little more floriferous, or beautiful, so I started with annuals and perennials. That's a lot of work, you know! Preparing a bed for pansies every year.

A. Lawyer: Yes, we know it. We do it.

Pearce: I got hold of Sydney Mitchell's book and read that thoroughly, and as I remember he expressed what a pleasure it was to get out in



the springtime of the year with your shovel and dig deep and turn the dirt over. So I did that religiously.

But, after a couple years of that--. I worked hard. I really didn't have the time to put in all that work. So, I went into something that I thought would be less laborious--I think it was chrysanthemums first--and I joined the Chrysanthemum Society.

A. Lawyer: I think we knew you then. We joined that society.

Pearce: Then, I had to learn that you had to transplant, had to make cuttings every year, and prepare your soil. Then, all through June, July, and August, you had to pinch back your plants. [laughs] It was just too much for me. Then I turned to irises. I thought that was going to be a lot less laborious. It was for a couple years.

I think the best example to explain what that's about is Mrs. Ruth Bancroft. She told me that she had one man--John was his name, I think--anyway, she and John worked six weeks, every August and September, digging up and separating one-third of her irises. And you know how many she has--six weeks just doing that! I did have about a hundred irises, and good ones, too. I did some hybridizing.

What really got me there was the gophers. I planted the whole hundred of them in my back yard, in rows, and the gophers came in and went up and down, and ate every bulb except one. They ate all of the bulbs, all the rhizomes. That discouraged me. It was so systematic. We'd gotten two cats, and they finally got rid of the gophers, but we didn't get them in time.

#### Rhododendron Society

Pearce: Then, at the Business Men's Garden Club in San Francisco a very, very wonderful friend, Maury Sumner--do you know the Sumners? Maurice and Frances? Have you ever met them? They were tremendously interested in azaleas and in rhododendrons and they got me involved in that. There was a group that was just in the state of starting a rhododendron society, and I got in with them, and helped to start the Rhododendron Society. That has been permanent. They're a wonderful group, and I was proud to have helped in starting that.

A. Lawyer: It would be nice to know about some of the members that you contacted.



Pearce: Well, Maury and Frances Sumner were tops. They deserve to have awards as a team. The American Rhododendron Society has given him a gold medal for his work in rhododendrons and hybridizing. He's hybridized quite a few very successful rhododendrons. Probably the best one of all is 'Mi Amor'.

There's a cute little story there. The Sumners are a very close couple. I remember we took a trip with them one time up to the Northwest to a rhododendron conference in Portland. They sat in the front seat always, and my wife and I sat in the back seat. He would get in the driver's seat, and then Frances would cosy up close to him. You never separated them!

A. Lawyer: That's like us.

Pearce: Even to the extent that on the way back--. While we were up there, we bought many plants, and filled up the trunk completely with plants. So full, that we had to take our suitcases out of the trunk and put them in the seats. We had one suitcase in the front seat, and one suitcase in the back seat. And that separated Maury and Fran, and oh gee, she was just desolated because she couldn't cuddle up with him. I don't know what that was leading up to, offhand. Well, people I knew.

Maury has done a lot of hybridizing, with several outstanding successes, mainly 'Mi Amor', which has been given a medal by the Royal Horticultural Society; 'Mrs. Martha Wright'; and one named 'Owen Pearce', a low yellow variety which is carried by several nurseries. I introduced one rhododendron myself. It is a seedling given me by Halfdan Lem, a nurseryman in Seattle. It has been somewhat in the trade under the name of 'Muriel Pearce', for my wife. Incidentally, Dave Feathers named a lovely camellia in my name--Camellia 'Owen Pearce'.

Everett Farwell, he was a rhododendron nurseryman out in East Oakland. Everett was quite a character. He was the one that was working hardest to form a society. He got a group of maybe seven or eight of us that met for two years in the cafeteria at Oakland High School, once a month in the evening. He started out by giving us lectures on rhododendrons.

After two or three of them, he said, "Next time I'll get somebody to give us a talk besides myself, and you'll hear other sides of the rhododendron story." Well, next time came, and he hadn't done so; he spent another hour and a half telling us about rhododendrons. Each time he'd say, "Next time I'll have somebody come." For two years he did that! [laughter]

A. Lawyer: He liked to hear himself talk.



Pearce: He sure did. Finally, behind his back, we revolted. A man named Jim Moulton--he's passed away since--he was a top official, vice-president of PG&E, and he had a garden up in Berkeley on Vicente Road. We met at his home--Jack Osegueda was one of them, and the Sumners, and several others--and we organized the California Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

I was living then on Chabot Court in north Oakland, and my daughter went to Chabot School there. I heard they had an auditorium there where clubs could meet in the evening, I think on a Tuesday or whatever. We arranged that with the Oakland Board of Education, and so we had our first meeting. We invited everybody, and I think we publicized it a little bit, the Rhododendron Society. We invited Everett Farwell to come to the meeting.

Moulton was elected president, and I've forgotten who was vice-president, and I was program chairman. That really started it. For some reason or another, I seem to have an aptitude for getting programs. I've known a lot of people, and I knew how to contact them. They would come to speak at the meetings for me. The society turned out to be a big success. We had to go to different schools for meeting places, and we're now meeting down at the Garden Center in Oakland. That's how that started.

A. Lawyer: We enjoy going to Ted Kipping's programs, too. He's had some interesting speakers there. He's another one that knows how to contact people. He knows a lot of people.

L. Lawyer: Howard Kerrigan was in the Society.

Pearce: I don't think he was one of the charter members, but he was shortly after that. Of course, he's an azalea man. He did some work on rhododendrons, but he's more enthusiastic on azaleas.

A. Lawyer: He did 'Pink Gumpo' I think.

Pearce: I've heard of some recent ones that he has hybridized and introduced--he's still working at it.

A. Lawyer: We haven't seen him in years. Dr. [Panos] Caldis used to go with us to his nursery, even when it was in Oakland. It's not a good neighborhood anymore. He had a nice, little nursery.

Pearce: I don't know where he is now. He just recently rejoined the Rhododendron Society. I didn't know he had actually dropped out, but I hadn't seen him for quite a while.

A. Lawyer: Another man we met--I think his name was Moyles.





Pearce: Bill Moyles.

A. Lawyer: He had a lovely garden.

Pearce: He has a beautiful place. He likes rock gardens, rock garden material, as well as rhododendrons.

A. Lawyer: And he hybridized, too.

Pearce: Yes, he's done a lot of hybridizing. I have one of his out here. An incredible hybrid--one parent is the Grande series, with leaves that long, and the other parent is one of a series where the leaves are that long.

L. Lawyer: From twelve inches down to one inch.

Pearce: I have a plant out here in the garden. It blossomed once, and it had the flowers of the Grande--the big ones--but on a reduced scale. It hasn't flowered since. I hope it will again soon.

L. Lawyer: Was Gomez active?

Pearce: Gomez was never active in our society. He was all commercial. Boy, what a show he could put on.

Roy Hudson--he developed the rhododendron dell in Golden Gate Park--he was a member for quite a while, then he dropped out. I'm trying to think of some of the other old members. John Paul Evans, he was a great developer of the Vireya rhododendrons--a species of rhododendrons which are native only to the South Seas, New Guinea and places like that. They are an entirely different breed. Evans passed away a couple of years ago. He was a victim of Alzheimer's. His wife has carried on. I took a bus tour of two gardens last Friday, and one was to Evans's place up in Claremont Pines. What a beautiful garden it is. She's kept it up all by herself. High on a rock with two or three hundred rhododendrons, I guess.

A. Lawyer: She has many Malaysian ones?

Pearce: She has some of those, better known now as Vireyas, yes, quite a few because he specialized in that. What a garden!

In Marin County were members who had wonderful displays. Francis Mosher was one. A very voluble man, easily inflamed. He was shouting all the time, but he had good rhododendrons.  
[laughter]



Rock Garden Society

Pearce: By the same token, I guess you would say, I became very fond of alpine plants because of my experiences of pack trips in the High Sierra. I joined the American Rock Garden Society. I was pretty active. In fact, after several years I was asked by the national president to form a local chapter. It had had Western representatives for ten or fifteen years, but they never did anything. So, the president asked me to form one out here if I could. I said I would. Right from scratch, I called the first meeting to order. It wasn't a meeting, just an exploratory meeting over at the Hall of Flowers. I think there were about fifteen people present. Very few of them are still members. From Placerville, Pauline Croxton--do you know her?

A. Lawyer: I've heard of her.

Pearce: She was growing rock plants before I started, quite a bit before. She had a place up in Folsom then. She and her husband moved up to Placerville and started a nursery there, mainly for propagation and selling dwarf trees.

A. Lawyer: Conifers mostly?

Pearce: Yes, mostly conifers. He had been an employee of one of the nuclear companies outside of Sacramento. He quit that to start this nursery. It was a long, hard struggle. I don't know whether they ever have made very much money out of it, but they've enjoyed it. She was a very hard worker. After the first four or five years of the Rock Garden Society, she became president. It's developed, and it's become a good society.

A. Lawyer: I should say. They have a fine publication now.

Pearce: Did you see the last two numbers? Practically all California.

A. Lawyer: Right. You know, we have an article in there, too. And Wayne Roderick, too. There's some lovely pictures. It's exceptional.

I didn't know that you helped organize the Western Chapter of the Rock Garden Society. We're also very interested in knowing about your connection with the Business Men's Garden Club, and some of the people that were in it. I heard that you were program chairman for many years.



San Francisco Businessmen's Garden Club

Pearce: That's the third one of the societies that I mentioned that this neighbor, Harold Manor, brought me into after I moved up to Charles Hill Road in Orinda. Maurice Sumner was there--that's how I happened to get acquainted with him and many other friends. That San Francisco Businessmen's Garden Club met every Monday noon, at the Pig 'n Whistle in downtown San Francisco, on the third floor. After the first couple of years someone asked me if I would be a vice-president. The next year I was president. I just got acquainted with a lot of people there.

Bob Saxe--I don't know if you've ever heard of him. He was one of the most marvelous and delightful characters that I've ever known. He was a post office employee, and he prided himself on the fact that he was a mere post office employee. He'd go around and meet millionaires who liked rock gardens. Rock plants were his main specialty.

He was a stutterer. He was wonderful in public speaking, but he did stutter. And he had one of the most delightful senses of humor that I've ever heard. He used his stuttering to his advantage. He'd tell the story--always a humorous story, he'd just collect them out of his mind like nothing--and when he came to the final point of a story, he'd stutter, and held your attention until he finally got it out! He was terrific. Everybody loved him. He was noted for growing the beautiful show-type Auricula primroses.

He would bring a plant to Cal Hort Society--a beautiful plant, always well-groomed. Calceolaria darwinii was one, a very, very unusual plant. He blossomed it, and he brought it to Cal Hort. Here's this kind of short, stubby fellow, and he marched proudly down the aisle and faced the audience, and held this potted plant, and grinned, and kind of stomped his foot in pride, and he said, [stuttering] "This is C-C-Calceolaria darwinii." Then he said, "There, I got it out, didn't I?"

Bob and the Sumners and ourselves, we used to go up to Fort Bragg to visit Dr. [Paul G.] Bowman, who owned the hospital in Fort Bragg. He was the first one, I think, in this part of the country to establish a rhododendron private garden. He had a tremendous collection of species. He started around the late twenties, early in the history of rhododendrons in this part of the country. The five of us would go up there and stay overnight at one of the hotels, the Little River, or the Heritage House, and we'd stay overnight there at about twenty dollars a night, instead of a hundred fifty dollars a night that you pay now.



A. Lawyer: Was he a physician?

Pearce: Yes, and he owned and ran the hospital there at Fort Bragg.

A. Lawyer: It's kind of interesting to know what the professions are of some of these people that are into botany.

Pearce: It is, yes. John Paul Evans was a doctor in the Pill Hill area in Oakland. There seem to be a lot of doctors that go into horticulture.

A. Lawyer: When we talked about the Business Men's Garden Club [in our oral history], the interviewer, Mrs. Riess, was very interested. She said all the garden clubs she had ever heard of were only ladies. She was very surprised that there was a men's garden club.

Pearce: Well, there's a national Business Men's Garden Club organization, and there are Business Men's Garden Clubs all over the country. The first one around here was formed in Oakland. Howard Gilkey, who was the organizer and the inspiration behind the Oakland Spring Garden Shows, was a member of that. Harold Paige was in it. He was a great camellia grower. Dave Feathers--you must have heard of him--he's a member. Charlie Phillips. Well, any number. In fact, that Oakland men's garden club was the one that organized, originally, the Oakland Spring Garden Show. Arthur Navlet of Navlet's Nursery--he was an organizer of the garden show, too.

That was a tremendous group of men there. I didn't join it until after I retired because it was in Oakland on Friday noons when they met, every Friday noon. There was a Business Men's Garden Club in San Mateo, too. They had a very good group, a very active group. And there was one in Walnut Creek.

A. Lawyer: You'd think they'd have to be rather affluent businessmen to be able to take the time off for lunch.

Pearce: They were mostly, yes. That's one of the problems. Our San Francisco club now is in worse than the doldrums. I think it's a dying group. We used to have some sixty who attended regularly. We had a hundred and fifty at one time in members. Not all of them attended regularly. We had a meeting yesterday, and there were fifteen.

We're starting a campaign now to see if we can't get younger members. But our location at Fourth and Mission is a little bit far out from the main part of San Francisco business. Anybody that comes out there has to take two hours. We have two members





that come pretty regularly from the vicinity of California and Montgomery, and it takes at least two hours out of their time.

The membership in all of these clubs have been very active in gardening work. The men are enthusiastic and very knowledgeable. One of the best members that we've ever had in San Francisco was a man by the name of Emil Stiefvater. He ran a bakery business. His father started a bakery supply business in San Francisco, and he made a mint of money. Had a building of his own down in the industrial district. He lived in Hillsborough and was president, for a number of years, of the big San Mateo Garden Show.

##/

Pearce: The members would bring in material from their gardens and explain how they're grown, and answer questions about them. And Stiefvater used to bring an awful lot of material. At every meeting he'd bring one of those plastic bags from the cleaners--you know, the big bags--it would be half full of flowers.

Albert Wilson belongs, and he'd lecture us very often. He didn't come regularly--mostly when it pleased him and he could advertise himself. He's a likable guy.

L. Lawyer: I remember that somebody used to bring those grape hyacinths to show them off every year.

Pearce: Oh, Jim Madden.

L. Lawyer: Like it was a very unusual plant.

Pearce: Yes, we called him "Muscari Madden." [laughter]

L. Lawyer: I happened to be there twice when he had done that. It was quite an occasion.

Pearce: What happened, actually, this was just about the time that I joined the club, and I didn't meet him for two years. He became very ill and was out of circulation for about those two years, and then he started coming back again. In the meantime, he had quite a garden with quite a few Muscari in the garden, and they had multiplied. He'd bring in three or four bagfuls. He had the exact number: 541 bulbs in this one, and maybe 1,233 in that one. And he'd pass them out to the members.

I had one of the onions--I've forgotten the specific name of it--that I had planted. It had come in a pot, probably. I planted it out, and they just multiplied to beat the band. So, I



worked at it two weekends, I remember, and I got every bulb, every onion bulb out of the ground. I brought them into the club and imitated Jim. They got a big kick out of that.

He was a printing company free agent, going out, getting orders for letterheads, things like that, and going out and shopping at different printers to get the best price he could. He made a pretty good business out of it. I'm trying to think of something more about him. He passed away.

Wally Lane--I don't know if you've ever heard of him or not. His business was interior decoration. He had an office out in the Fillmore District in San Francisco. While he was running this interior decoration business--he got good prices, he was very good at it--he had a little nursery down in Aptos, which we visited several times. He grew orchids and many different kinds of things. Then he moved down to Watsonville, closed his interior decorating shop, and he's selling chrysanthemums and orchids, and he's doing a very good business with several greenhouses.

But he is a very impatient man. Anybody less intelligent than he, he almost insults them, and so forth. This Jim Madden, who didn't--I don't like to say didn't have the intelligence, but he didn't measure up to Wally's standard--Wally befriended Jim, and went overboard in helping him garden, and so forth. So, we had wonderful characters like that.

A. Lawyer: Looks like there's a lot of camaraderie in that group.

Pearce: There was. Yes, very definitely, very definitely. It hurts me to see it dwindle the way it has. I've still got the roster of fifteen, twenty years ago, where names are so familiar to me, most of them gone by now.

The old Pig 'n Whistle where we met was on the third floor. We had to climb two flights of stairs--narrow ones. Sad to say, I got one of my fellow workers--he was an architect who drew plans for a firm I was with, a very, very clever fellow--he became interested in the club, and we'd go down there on every Monday noon. One Monday noon, we climbed those two flights of stairs. He was showing off a little fuschia, as I remember, that he had grown, and all of a sudden, he flopped. He died right there in front of us. That was a terrible thing. I knew him and his wife pretty well, so I had to phone her.



Victor Reiter and Frank Reinelt

A. Lawyer: Was Victor Reiter a member?

Pearce: Victor Reiter has always been a member, but he never attended, except when he was asked to talk. He was a wonderful, lovable person, too. Vic was one of the finest persons I've ever known.

A. Lawyer: He was very active in Cal Hort.

Pearce: Very active in Cal Hort, and he attended that regularly. His family are still going there. His wife still goes there and the daughter and her husband, Bob Scudder. The two of them, husband and wife, have quite a firm of landscape designing--not just designing, but landscape gardening as well. He has a license.

A. Lawyer: He did some wonderful hybridizing, too, Victor.

Pearce: Yes, he made a big reputation on fuschias. He's known the world over on fuschias. Very few people know it, but he worked with Frank Reinelt of Vetterle and Reinelt on quite a few things, particularly succulent plants, echeverias. Reinelt is noted for his primroses and delphiniums. His delphiniums were absolutely terrific.

A. Lawyer: He also did daffodil breeding.

Pearce: I guess he did. He and Sydney Mitchell worked on daffodils.

L. Lawyer: Then, he got into a problem with the borers, the bulb flies--

A. Lawyer: Maggots.

Pearce: And the narcissus fly.

L. Lawyer: He had a lot of trouble with that, and he finally decided that he just couldn't grow them there. So he gave us maybe his whole collection. We had hundreds of bulbs, all the colors of the rainbow.

A. Lawyer: That was when they were just getting started with the dark trumpets. But we gave up on breeding, because it takes seven years before you get a bloom.

Pearce: Yes, that's quite a project, yes. I remember one experience with Frank Reinelt that was rather characteristic, I think. Jack Spring and I--. You know Jack Spring? He was the general manager of the park department in San Francisco, a successor in line from



John McLaren, that job. (This incident was before Jack became the head of the department.) We wanted to arrange a program for Cal Hort, so we went down on a Sunday to Vetterle and Reinelt's place in Santa Cruz, to his home. Found his wife there, and she said that he was down in his nursery, and she was sure we could find him.

So, we went down there. It was open. We could walk in. It wasn't opened for business or anything, but we could go in. She told us to, in fact. We looked all over for him, and we couldn't find him. Finally, we get to the place where he was growing his delphiniums. It was just the time of year for blossoming. These delphiniums were eight or ten feet high, growing in maybe twenty-five rows, or something like that, about two or three feet apart. Absolutely gorgeous.

We were going along the bottom of the rows of delphiniums and here was Frank Reinelt coming down in between the rows, and he was inspecting the beautiful delphiniums in full blossom. Here was a gorgeous thing, this big at the bottom and going into a perfect pyramid almost, just beautiful, and he'd look at it, and he'd pull it out by the roots, and stomp on it. It wasn't perfect for seed. He was growing them for seed, and if there was any imperfection, he didn't want that to be carried through. So, all these valuable plants--he could have sold them for a hundred dollars apiece!

A. Lawyer: We do the same thing with our iris breeding. People keep saying, "Why do you do that? Why don't you give that to me?" And Lewis always says, "No, we don't want to give you anything that we wouldn't want to keep for ourselves."

Pearce: That's right. That's true of all hybridizers, rhododendrons and anything else.

A. Lawyer: He was an outstanding man. Genius, really.

Pearce: He sure was.

Sydney B. Mitchell, Cora Brandt, and the Strybing Arboretum

Pearce: Sydney Mitchell is another man who--did you ever meet him?

L. Lawyer: I really didn't know him. I've been to his place. [Professor Edward O.] Essig took me to his place.





Pearce: I remember him from back when I was in college. He was the head of the library department. I never knew him then, though I worked two or three nights a week at the desks in the magazine room at the library. I was fortunate--all the other fellows that were working at the library were at the loan desk, and they were busy all the time. But I was working mostly in the reference department. I could bring my studies there, and work there, and occasionally somebody would come and want a question answered, or something.

Anyway, I remember Sydney Mitchell. There was something--I don't know what it was--something wrong with his legs, and he walked in a kind of a bouncy manner, just as if he had springs in his knees, or something like that.

L. Lawyer: I remember seeing him walking. Very distinctive.

Pearce: In his garden he always had a one-legged stool that he carried around with him. He couldn't stand very long at one time, so he'd sit down on the stool right in the middle of the garden. Very, very, clever.

When I got active in the California Horticultural Society, he was a legend. He had been founder and president of Cal Hort to start with. I think he was president for ten years, or something like that. Then in 1940 they started the Journal of the California Horticultural Society and he was the first editor for ten years.

When I joined, I became--for some reason or another, within two years they asked me to be a member of the board of directors. Gee, that was flattering, and I enjoyed it very much. I don't think he attended the meetings. I think he was automatically a member of the board. I was made program chairman after I became a member of the board. Sydney Mitchell was on the program committee, so we met at his house, and that's where I really became acquainted with him.

After that, for two or three years, we met every third Monday at Schroeder's Restaurant for dinner, and then went out to Cal Hort meeting. Cal Hort met in the Merchant's Exchange Club on the twelfth or thirteenth floor of the building. Beautiful room for meetings. That's where I got to know Sydney Mitchell. What a wonderful person he was. He was always just congenial, and his wife was just as nice as he. They were a wonderful couple.

I remember that at one of the program committee meetings, he offered to do a program. He usually did it once a year, anyway, and he gave a wonderful program. So, we fixed it up for him. We



had the meeting, and after the show-and-tell of the meetings I had to introduce him as the program speaker. I got up and gave a not too flowery introduction because, as I said, "He's too well-known to spend any time on that. So, I present to you--" Then, my mind became a blank. I couldn't think of his name! I thought and I thought and I thought. Everybody started to laugh, and here comes Sydney Mitchell walking up the aisle, laughing to beat the band. He patted my back and said, "Don't worry, they all know me."

A. Lawyer: He certainly made some fine contributions.

Pearce: He sure did.

L. Lawyer: He sure did. And to librarianship, too. It's very interesting that anybody who had dealings with him remembered him as a teacher.

Pearce: Did you ever get acquainted with Jane Gates over at the Strybing Arboretum Library?

L. Lawyer: No.

Pearce: She is a wonderful librarian. She knew him slightly. Too long ago for actual contact.

As I said, I worked at this UC Library reference desk, and that gave me a little library knowledge and experience, just on the edge. So, when they formed the library over at Strybing I helped quite a lot, mostly from the point of building the structure. I was on the committee to watch over that. I've been on the library committee ever since.

I was going to mention also Cora Brandt. When I was in college and working at the library, I used to see her once in a while, but I never knew her. She was a secretary, I believe, to Sydney Mitchell. After Cal Hort was established, she became the secretary of that society due to her connection with Sydney Mitchell. She's another wonderful person that I'll never forget.

Her specialty was azaleas. She had a place on Benvenue Street in Berkeley, near Woolsey, if I remember rightly, and I think she had about a thousand azaleas there, many of them test plants from the azalea--. I've forgotten the nursery in Washington, D.C., a government-run nursery of some kind. They had a great deal to do with development of azaleas. For Western testing, testing in this area, she received forty or fifty plants every year.







Left to right: Owen Pearce, Alice Eastwood, James Roof,  
John Thomas Howell. Tilden Park Botanic Gardens, circa 1953.



Dr. Paul Bowman, "Dean of Rhododendrons," and Victor Reiter, Jr., 1970.







Robert Saxe,  
1951.



Eric Walther, 1955  
(*Magnolia campbelli*,  
Strybing Arboretum).





She was a very gracious person. When you'd meet her she'd nod her head graciously. People would come in at Cal Hort meetings, and she sat at the secretary's desk and greeted everybody that came through. They all loved her. I had to announce her death when I was president of the Cal Hort Society. Some people had heard of it, but when I finally mentioned it, it seemed just like a blow to everybody present.

But about the [Strybing] Arboretum--that has been, I think, the main joy of my life in horticulture. When I was president of the Cal Hort, I used to go out to see the Arboretum. I was reading books, and I would go over there on Saturdays, or something like that, and go through the Arboretum. I met Eric Walther there occasionally. He was a little bit hard to get really acquainted with, but I did.

They wanted a picture of him for something, and I took my camera over one day and took his picture. In a book that was printed, after his demise, on echeverias, which were his specialty, they used my picture of him as the frontispiece. We got to know each other pretty well. He told me about plans that he had for a future hall of flowers. He'd had somebody draw something with a classical design, columns and so forth. He really had a palace. It never went ahead, fortunately, I think.

His office was in a little house not too far from the Japanese garden. It was a little shed about fifteen feet square, or something like that, a little, wooden shed. He had about fifty cats that he locked up there at nighttime. It smelled awful. Nobody would ever want to go into his office. He was used to it. I don't know whether he locked them all up, but I know some of them were. But, he felt that they were of excellent service in control of gophers, and things like that. I'm sure that after he passed away, or after he retired, I think the cats were eliminated. They're not there now, anyway. One little foible of his was protection of his plants.

#### California Horticultural Society Meetings

Pearce: Brings to mind Mabel Symmes and her sister Mrs. Anson [Anita Symmes] Blake. Mrs. Blake was a very wonderful horticulturist. Her husband [Anson Blake] owned a rock and sand business over just the other side of San Quentin. The Blake house is the one that is used by the president of UC, up in north Berkeley [Kensington].



Mrs. Blake was known by everybody, and she gave a lecture at Cal Hort one time to tell about her acquaintances with people who were horticulturists, and how she had got a lot of the plants. She gave a beautiful lecture, and at one point, she was telling about how she went right to this person in South Africa, or this person in Japan, and so forth. She says, "Most of my collecting was done that way, but," she said, she put her hand behind her back, "there were other means by which I collected, too." Very cute. She was a very prim-looking lady.

Eric Walther had a phobia about people who were going to steal plants. I heard about one woman, who would come into the Arboretum with a big paper sack, from Safeway or someplace, and he'd spot her and follow her, fifty feet behind, watching her all the time. From what I was told, she did this on purpose!

Eric Walther, when they would show materials at the Cal Hort Society, was an absolute marvel. There wasn't a plant that you could bring in that he didn't know about. They still bring in extraordinary plants, but not nearly in such abundance as they used to in the old days. People had big gardens. They don't have big gardens very much anymore. It's mostly the nursery men, or things like that. But, in the old days of Cal Hort--did you ever go to the meetings when they were in the Merchant's Exchange?

L. Lawyer: No.

Pearce: They'd have eight or ten tables set up there. Instead of one piddly little flower, they'd have ten or fifteen branches of the same thing. Absolutely beautiful. The first job I got at Cal Hort was chairman of that committee to see that plants were brought in--try to get people to do it.

#### Jim Roof and the Tilden Botanic Garden

Pearce: I heard about Jim Roof over at the Tilden Botanic Garden, and what a collection he had. I went over there one day, and that's quite a story, too, knowing Jim Roof. He was quite a wonderful character, but a mean guy at times. This time, I went over Sunday morning. They said he was there all the time. I knocked at the door of his cabin, which was away from the garden, up in another part of Tilden Park. After several knocks, he answered. I woke him up, and he was mad. I told him what I wanted, yelling at the top of my voice through the door. I think he was still in bed when he talked to me. He said, "Well, come around again this



afternoon at two o'clock," or something like that, "and we'll talk to each other."

Well, after that he was just as nice as pie. It got so that every month, on the Sunday before Cal Hort, I'd go over--for two or three years I did this--I'd go around through Tilden Park Botanic Garden there, the native garden, and he would give me a lecture for two hours. It didn't start that way, but he finally got so he didn't want me to leave. I often kept my wife waiting dinner Sunday evenings. Gee, I learned an awful lot from that man.

A. Lawyer: You were a good student, and he appreciated you.

Pearce: It was wonderful. I'd bring in maybe sprays of eight or ten different native plants. I'd have two two-gallon buckets with water and these sprays in them, and I'd show them off, and then I'd lecture to the Cal Hort about them. And they all thought I was an expert on native plants, and I got quite a reputation.

A. Lawyer: I think that's still an outstanding native plant garden.

Pearce: Oh, it is, definitely. And Wayne Roderick did a good job.

A. Lawyer: I love the way it's arranged, you know, even more than the [UC] Berkeley Botanical Garden even.

[insert added by Owen Pearce] Jim Roof was very proud of the California Native Plant Garden, known as Tilden Park Botanic Garden. He had long wanted to show it to Miss Alice Eastwood, retired curator of botany at the Academy of Sciences, located in Golden Gate Park. I told Jim that I knew her through the San Francisco Business Men's Garden Club. She was known as the Sweetheart of that club. And she was always the honored guest at the annual Ladies' Night banquet at the Bellevue Hotel in San Francisco, in mid-spring.

To describe that event--on tables around the perimeter of the banquet room, club members displayed the floral beauties of their gardens. Imagine a ten-foot table covered with rhododendron sprays and trusses; another with camellia flowers fastened to a short branch of leaves; and another containing ten or fifteen potted orchids; and another with many vases filled with sprays of blossoming shrubs; and still another holding about forty or so four-inch pots of show-type auricula primroses in bloom!

Alice Eastwood, at ninety-two, would be seated at the head table, beaming at the flower show. She was always given a handsome corsage prepared by the top San Francisco florist shop.





When she was presented to the assembled group by the president of the club, she would point out the various flowers in the bouquet and tell short, endearing stories about them.

Jim asked me to bring her over to his garden to show her the native plants, of which she was an authority. So one Saturday morning I picked her up at her home on a steep hillside in San Francisco, together with John Thomas Howell, her successor as curator of botany at the Academy.

That day was one of the most memorable of my life. I, a mere neophyte in botany, was accompanying three of the top botanists of the era, listening to their discussions of the various plants. Since Alice could not walk too well at her age, I drove on paths and across lawns so that she wouldn't miss anything. She complained that she couldn't see as well as she used to, but when I drove by one plant without stopping, she called out the name of it, and we all chorused, "There's nothing wrong with your eyesight, Alice!"

That summer she flew alone to Sweden to a world plant conference held every ten years. Of the couple of hundred members of the conference she stood out among the group, and she told us later, when she told our garden club of the trip, that she had been babied and terribly spoiled. She was singled out by the King of Sweden for a lunch with him. And she told us of a meeting of specialists on nomenclature. She had expected it to be a small committee. "But," she told us, "there were about sixty or more old men." She stopped, and then she said, "Well, a few years ago, I would have said they were old!" I think she was about ninety-four when she passed away.

The wife of one of our garden club members, Mrs. G. O. [Carol Green] Wilson, wrote a book, Alice Eastwood's Wonderland, which is a delight to read, for it brings out the charm of Alice Eastwood. Mrs. Wilson autographed the book for me, with a nice personal note.

But back to Jim Roof and Tilden Park. [end of insert]

Jim Roof was not an artist, and had no artistic feelings in him. They had a flood down on--what's the name of the creek there? Wildcat Canyon. Well, anyway, they had a flood. It washed out a lot of the plants that he had planted on the banks or even above the banks, the water went that high. So, he lined the bank there--bottom and sides--with concrete, mud concrete. Jim Roof did that. And he put in white, concrete sidewalks all the way through. It was really awful-looking from an artistic





landscaping point of view. But, he did have the plants. He had the knowledge of how to grow them and so forth.

When Bill [William Penn] Mott was made director of the regional parks he wasn't familiar with growing native plants at all. He came around to inspect these places, and I think it was his first visit to Tilden Park Botanic Garden. Jim's handyman was showing him around, and standing by and listening to the comments that Bill and his two or three companions were making.

They got up to one kind of an inspiration point where you could view the whole garden, right where the offices are now. All Bill Mott saw was Jim Roof's concrete-lined creek and the white sidewalks all over the place, you know. He made a remark: "This has got to go." I heard that from Jim later. Bob Owens was his helper. He told that to Jim.

So that soured Jim on Bill Mott right then. Bill Mott told me later that the night after that, when Bill came home, his wife met him and said, "There's kind of a wild-looking man in the parlor who says he wants to talk to you." Bill says, "Okay." He walked in, and he didn't know Jim, but he held out his hand, walked toward him and said, "I'm Bill Mott."

Jim stood up but did not hold out his hand, and he looked Bill in the eye. He says, "My name is Jim Roof. I am the director of the Tilden Park Botanic Garden, and I want you to know that I will brook no interference whatever in the management of my garden." He turned and walked out. Isn't that a swell way to meet your new boss? Anyway, I got to know Jim Roof, and I was just pleased to get that education that he gave me. But that feud between Mott and Jim lasted throughout Bill Mott's term.

Jim's problems went on even after he had to retire. They retired him, but he wouldn't retire. And then Wayne took over. Jim published letters in the Letters to the Editor section of the Oakland Tribune. He wrote comments on the way that Wayne was running the garden. Said he was ruining the garden. He'd visit the garden nearly every day, and he wouldn't speak to Wayne when he came in. And they had been friends before. They found out when he passed away that he had a brain tumor.

But the feud with Bill Mott continued also. Mai Arbegast and Everett Wieslander and I were appointed on a committee by the friends of Jim Roof, who was threatened with the loss of his job when Bill Mott came. Jim gathered a whole bunch of his cronies and people that he worked with and knew, and they formed the Friends of Jim Roof Society [later, Friends of Tilden Botanic



Garden], which became the California Native Plant Society eventually.

There was a lady, Mary Wohlers, who was very close to Jim--I just don't know really how close. [laughs] But she aided him and abetted him in this quarrel, and she wrote poison pen letters to the Tribune and other places about Bill Mott. Bill had a terrific problem in there for a while. Quite a lot of publicity.

Mai Arbegast and Wieslander and myself were appointed to the committee--it hadn't become the Native Plant Society at that time --to try to bridge the gulf between Roof and Mott, or to give a report to the Regional Park District offices. Mai wrote a beautiful letter recommending what actions should be taken. We wanted to enlarge the botanic garden. But then Everett, who was a tremendous man himself--I was with him on the second of January on his hundredth birthday this year--had an ambition to make another garden, if and when he got the money, up in Grass Valley, as they call it, an area owned by the regional parks south of where the regional parks offices are.

Jim Roof got word of it, and he thought that the three of us were trying to get rid of his garden. Boy, was I his enemy then. My greatest regret is that I never got any poison pen letters from Mary Wohlers. I didn't rate! [laughs] But, it got to Wayne. I went up to Reno one time with Wayne, and we talked about it. He thought that I had been interfering there.

I explained the whole thing, that we were pushing Jim's garden, and wanting to enlarge it, but this would develop in case Everett got the money. Well, he never got the money. It was a long time before Jim would ever look at me. I met him several times, and he would just pass right by me. But one day I was in the park, and he started to pass by me, and I was escorting a friend, so I cornered him, and introduced him to this other friend, and he opened up then. He never did forgive me, but I didn't do anything.

A. Lawyer: Well, he must have been a little mentally disturbed, or suspicious of everyone.

Pearce: Yes, I'm sure he was. But, he sure knew his stuff. Well, that was a little digression from the arboretum and Eric Walther.



Strybing Arboretum Society, Organization and Direction

Pearce: Before Eric Walther retired--I think he retired around 1959--there were a lot of people that were concerned about what was going to happen to Strybing Arboretum. A group got together, and I think the California Nurserymen's Association was primarily responsible. Charlie Burr--I don't know if you've ever heard that name--he was a power in the Nurserymen's Association. He represented at different times different nurseries. The California Nursery Company down in Niles, I know he worked with them for quite awhile.

Well, they got together with some friends. Victor Reiter was in on it, Elizabeth McClintock, and some other people whom I don't remember. I don't think Eric was there. We discussed the whole problem, and decided we should form a society, and said that we should appoint a committee to look into it. They asked Vic to be the chairman of the committee. He wouldn't take it. They asked Charlie Burr--"Well, I'm too busy."

I was president of the Cal Hort Society then, and finally, about the end of the line, they asked me to be chairman, because I was president of the society, and I agreed to do so.

Jules Christensen of the Christensen Nursery was made the vice-chairman of this committee, and we were the committee, the two of us. I went down to his nursery below San Mateo--one of those towns down there. We had several conferences on what to do. We finally decided that we should form a society, and we would call a meeting for that purpose. We had a meeting--I think it was in a room at the deYoung Museum in December.

We made the report to the group, and recommended that a society be formed. Everybody agreed. We got Hilary Crawford to help. He was an attorney and a very devout plantsman. (His daughter-in-law is a good plantswoman, also.) We finally decided at this December meeting that the name of the group was the Strybing Arboretum Society of Golden Gate Park. They elected me their president, and then we got to work on organization.

We had weekly or monthly meetings--I've forgotten which now --and wrote out a constitution and bylaws. There was a Mrs. Kelsey, Ruth Kelsey, she was a close friend of Elizabeth McClintock, and she worked on it. And Elizabeth worked like a Trojan on this too, as secretary. Hilary Crawford helped us with that legally, with no charge, which was quite an item.



#/#

Pearce: When we were forming the constitution and bylaws for the Strybing Arboretum Society, another of the hardest workers was Paul Hutchison, who was the botanist in charge at the UC Botanical Garden at Berkeley. Paul was a fellow with a quick flash of anger at anything that went wrong. If I did something wrong sometimes at Cal Hort--. He would bring plants. He was especially good with succulents. When I was chairman of the plant committee I inadvertently did something wrong, and he'd flare up. I don't know, I just didn't get along with him.

Anyway, he was a good botanist, friendly with Elizabeth McClintock. So he came in and he also spent a lot of time with us when I was working, and this was beginning to affect a little bit my time of working, because I often had to bring work at home at nighttime, and even on Saturdays and Sundays I often had to work.

We agreed that the first annual meeting would be in June--I think it was June, it might have been May--and there we elected new officers, and Paul Hutchison was elected president at that time. Well, he didn't get along with his boss at the UC Botanical Garden. He'd flare up there, and he wanted to get his way, and he'd offer to resign if he didn't get it. The director would try to placate him, and he'd come back the next day and everything would be all right again. Finally, it got so bad that he offered to resign one day and the resignation was accepted. [laughter] It kind of relieved things around there. Paul went down to southern California. He became a commercial grower of proteas, and I think he made a big thing out of that. He was quite a man, there's no question about it.

After he left as president, Elizabeth McClintock was made president. She could put a lot of time in on the job. She and Mrs. Kelsey really carried the Society through for several years until Marshall Madison of Pillsbury, Madison, and Sutro--have you ever heard of them? That's the big law firm of San Francisco--Marshall Madison became president. He took an interest. He grew succulents.

All this while, we were drawing in wealthy people to back the Society and to bolster it in getting new members. It was quite a challenge. It is just wonderfully satisfactory to me to see that this little society, formed in 1955, is now a two or three million dollar corporation. Just wonderful to see. I stayed on the board of directors of the Strybing Arboretum Society for quite a number of years. Finally I had to retire because they passed a new ruling that directors could serve only two terms. But I was on the building committee, and I'm still on the library committee.





A. Lawyer: Very exceptional, devoted members there.

Pearce: Yes. The past presidents, Peggy Brown, Mrs.--what was her husband's name? [Cabot Brown] He was an attorney. She was a wonderful person. Mrs. Byra [William] Wreden was a person--her husband is a book maker of some kind down in Redwood City, I believe, and she had a very lovely house. We met down there sometimes, and she was a power.

Elsa Uppman Knoll, who was garden editor for Sunset Magazine, was a wonderful person, a beautiful lady. Oh, she was wonderful. Highly interested in gardens, of course. She was a blonde and dressed beautifully. I remember one time we were just beginning a Cal Hort meeting, and she came in, down some steps into this big hall. Looked like the queen coming in! Just that kind of an entrance. She was a terrific person, and she helped out a lot. I think she was the power behind the idea of developing that Sunset Garden development inside the Arboretum--the garden which was supposed to set examples for an ordinary gardener. Of course, the gardens they put in were ten times the size of an ordinary garden, but they had ideas that an ordinary gardener could use. Well, Elsa Knoll I think was responsible for bringing that in.

Emily Warner I think at an early, early date came in as office manager, and she served until about three or four years ago. She helped develop that whole Arboretum Society. Just an awful lot of work that she did, and how she ever handled all that, I don't know. Bookkeeping, she did the whole thing by herself. So, they had a very competent group that was deeply interested.

Keith Davey, the tree man, was on the board, and he helped a lot. Well, that's the principle thing on the founding of the Society.

A. Lawyer: What about the facility itself, the building?

Pearce: The Hall of Flowers was built before the Society was formed. The Society was formed in 1955 and the Hall of Flowers was built before that, so we had one room in the office wing. The library wasn't built, though. That was later [1972]. Incidentally, my firm, builders, bid on that Hall of Flowers, and gee, I wish we had gotten it so I could have something to look back to there. But, we were not the low bidder.

There was a short period where the Arboretum didn't have any real good director, and finally, through Vic Reiter more than anybody else, they got Jock [Percy Haddon] Brydon to take on the job of director of the gardens in 1960. He did a beautiful job. He had a wonderful personality. The ladies loved him, and so did



the men. He really helped to organize the Strybing Arboretum Society, and worked with them, and developed the garden, and brought it out of the doldrums.

It really was getting in pretty run-down shape because Eric Walther had a character which kind of made some of his bosses in the park department unhappy--they were at odds with him. He didn't like politics, and the politicians were trying to run him and the arboretum. So, I think he was actually glad to get out from under the job.

Jock Brydon came in, and he had very good relations for quite a while. The politics eventually got him down, got him very dissatisfied. But, he did bring the Arboretum up, and Vic Reiter was the main man in getting him to do that through the Society, and really established things on a good basis.

We've had pretty good directors ever since. Roy Hudson was the director for awhile. When he retired from the Golden Gate Park administration they made him director of the Arboretum for two or three years. Then, John Bryan came. At first everybody thought he was fine. He was a good lecturer, but he was for John Bryan. Finally, the park employees, the gardeners, had a lot of trouble with him, and they formally asked him to resign, which he did.

Walden Valen, who is now the director, has been a success. He's all right. He didn't have the horticultural, educational training, or the Ph.D. He didn't have that behind him, he came up through the ranks. But he's a good man, and everybody's very happy with him.

#### Helen Crocker Russell Library

Pearce: The library, which was my pet, was instigated mainly by Mrs. Peggy Brown, as I mentioned, and Byra Wreden and Mrs. Robert Homans. There were three of them. They said that they wanted a library. They thought a horticultural library would be just the right thing for Strybing Arboretum Society. It would be an expensive thing, but they didn't let that hamper them.

Peggy Brown particularly--she knew a lot of people, society people--she went out and drummed her friends, people that I didn't think would be likely to do it, to help. They drummed up, I believe, three hundred thousand dollars with which to build a library, and they got the architect. Emily Warner's husband, I think, was mostly responsible for it. He worked with Gardner



Dailey, who was the architect for the library. They had a grand opening day, and it's proved its worth ever since.

Jane Gates was the second librarian. Barbara Ingle was the first, and she got it well started. I don't know why she resigned. Jane came in. She's internationally known now as a horticultural librarian. She didn't have any training in horticulture, but she learned, and she has been president of the International Horticultural Library Association. So, that's quite a thing.

### Editing California Horticultural Journal##

[Interview 3: May 17, 1990]

Pearce: I haven't mentioned the editing of the Cal Hort Journal.

A. Lawyer: How many years was that?

Pearce: Twelve [1963-1975]. And, I had been chairman of the Publications Committee for three or four years before that. Ernest Wertheim, when he was president of Cal Hort, appointed me the chairman of the publications committee.

I was one of the first docents at the Arboretum Society, and that group developed into the Docents Committee, which has played a very important part in the history of the Society. I was chairman of the committee at one time. Then, I represented the Arboretum Society on the Pacific Horticultural Foundation Board as the California Horticultural Society's Publications Committee Chairman, and later, editor of the California Horticultural Journal.

I was the editor of the journal for twelve years. Originally, the California Horticultural Journal was a product of the California Horticultural Society. Early in my term as the editor they got together a group: Billy Schmidt, a nurseryman from Palo Alto and member of the California Horticultural Society, had formed an additional society, the Western Horticultural Society, located down on the San Francisco Peninsula. They got together the three organizations, the Cal Hort, the Western Hort, and the Strybing Arboretum Society, and formed the Pacific Horticultural Foundation, for the sole purpose of publishing what was then the Journal of the California Horticultural Society. That was the name given it by Sydney Mitchell.



Seven years after the founding of the California Horticultural Society, Sydney B. Mitchell, the Society's president, started, and became editor of, "The Journal of the California Horticultural Society." He was editor for ten years [January 1940-October 1949] and was followed for a few years, until she passed away, by Cora Brandt [January 1950-January 1954]. She was followed by Dr. Don Pratt, a physician, until [January] 1961 when Jock Brydon, director of the Strybing Arboretum, took over. When Jock's official duties became too heavy for him, he suggested that I be appointed. The Foundation board approved because I had been chairman of the Publications Committee, and because Jock said that I was doing all his work, anyway. [laughter]

Shortly after the Pacific Horticultural Foundation was formed, the Southern California Horticultural Institute joined it, so there were four prestigious horticultural groups that formed that society.

[inserted added by Owen Pearce] From its beginning, the Journal of the California Horticultural Society was a total volunteer production. None of the editors, Sydney Mitchell, Cora Brandt, Don Pratt, Jock Brydon, nor myself, were paid for the time we put into publication. If my telephone bill was large enough, I occasionally submitted an account. I hasten to say, as other volunteers have often said, that I got much more out of the work, in knowledge and in friendships, than I expended. And all articles printed in the Journal were volunteer. No writer, professional or amateur, received any remuneration. The Journal's high reputation was lagging somewhat when Jock Brydon assumed the editorship, but he quickly rejuvenated it with articles of high quality obtained from experts in their fields. And I endeavored to maintain that quality.

The membership of the California Horticultural Society consisted of both advanced amateur and plain dirt gardeners, but it also included trained professional nurserymen and teachers and researchers. So the type of articles published were of a nature to please the more educated people, yet to instruct and stimulate beginners. Circulation was limited to the societies' members, and that they were pleased is confirmed by it's thirty-five years of continuous publication. One unfortunate limitation prevented some university teachers and professors from contributing: the Journal wasn't scientifically qualified by universities to recognize articles printed in the Journal, so many university people have often turned down requests for articles. There have been many exceptions to this situation, fortunately.







Types of articles have varied greatly, which has lent interest to the readers. There have been many special issues confined entirely to one subject. One of the best, now out of print, was the Golden Gate Park issue, printed on the 100th anniversary of the park. It was the first issue to have a colored cover, which depicted the Conservatory in the park. I took that picture. Jock Brydon's interest in rhododendrons had an immediate effect in a rhododendron issue; and there were special numbers on rock gardens, gardens in Santa Barbara, horticultural activities at the University of California, at UC Davis, Berkeley Botanical Gardens, and a widely-acclaimed bonsai issue.

The list of authors through the years is impressive: it includes Victor Reiter, Jr., fuchsia hybridizer, internationally known; Dr. Elizabeth McClintock, curator of botany at the California Academy of Sciences; Harry Butterfield, Bob Raabe, and Robert Ornduff, all of UC Berkeley; Arthur Menzies, Roy Hudson, Geraldine Knight Scott, Howard Gilkey, Morgan Evans, Emily Brown, Lester Rowntree, and many others.

Lester Rowntree wrote quite often for the magazine, but towards the end her eyesight failed her and she discontinued writing. I personally interviewed her at her home in Carmel Highlands, one of several visits. At the last one I told her that she had much yet to contribute to garden knowledge, but she refused because of her sight. I offered to bring a tape recorder to record stories for us, but again, she refused. "The ideas," she said, "are here." And she pointed at her head. "But the only way I can get them out is this." And she brought her pointed finger down from the head through the shoulder, down the right arm to her fingers, where she would hold the pen. "So, I can't see to do it any more. But," she said, "I can still swim!"

Many of the articles were well-written by experienced writers, or even by inexperienced ones. But I sometimes had difficulties with excellent gardeners or plantsmen because of lack of ability to express themselves. Then I would coax them along and do part of the writing for them. But others were very annoyed if I edited an article too heavily, even though it was necessary. I received one article on *Vireya* rhododendrons, valuable in its content but very poor in phraseology. When I returned the edited copy to the author, he told me that his was a poetic nature and he wrote the way he felt. He said I could use the rewritten story, but not to use his name. I was in a quandary, but I waited for a week, and then he told me it was all right and to go ahead with its publication.

Albert Wilson, author of "How Does Your Garden Grow?" submitted a story of his part in the beginnings of the garden at



Filoli. He wrote in just the same manner in which he spoke, which was not always grammatical. I corrected the copy, but retained his manner of speech as far as possible, and he never made any objection. Another writer made an article twice as long as the limit I set, and when I cut it down of necessity she became angry and has not spoken to me in many years, although her husband is still a good friend.

I had much help from the Publications Committee of six to ten members. At monthly meetings we discussed, mainly, future topics for articles, and the proper author. Without this help I could never have gone along for so many years of maintaining interest. Dr. Fred O. Coe, who was a radiologist in Washington, D.C. for many years, was at one time president of the American Horticultural Society and had a vital part in their prestigious magazine. He was a great help to us all and was missed when ill health set in and he passed away.

On the issuing of a number which celebrated the Journal's twenty-fifth anniversary, Ed Bills, a commercial artist member of the Cal Hort Society and a friend of Sydney Mitchell, made a remarkable drawing of Mr. Mitchell which we used for the magazine's cover. Of inestimable help, too, were Elizabeth McClintock and Dr. Herbert C. Baker, professor of botany at UC Berkeley, both of whom checked all copy for horticultural accuracy.

Victor Reiter, Jr., became president of the Pacific Horticultural Foundation upon its formation by the four prestigious societies, and he was a great influence in developing the magazine. He had ambitions for a greater magazine than our forty-page publication, which we finally achieved in the appearance of its successor, Pacific Horticulture. But the original magazine, renamed the California Horticultural Journal, filled its purpose well, and is still highly spoken of by its old friends. [end of insert]

At a meeting of the California Horticultural Society in the Hall of Flowers--the only time they met there because their lecture room in the Academy of Sciences had been changed to that one night, that one month--we had a lecturer at that program named George Waters. He had just recently come from England, and he gave a lecture on the changes in horticultural practices in England. He had been instrumental in forming a horticultural history committee in England, and he gave a very interesting lecture. As a result, I asked him to become a member of the Pacific Horticultural Foundation's Publications Committee. A short while after he had done so, we appointed him as assistant editor.



## FROM THE EDITOR

The response from readers of the first issue of *Pacific Horticulture* has been very gratifying. We have received many compliments on its appearance and contents, resulting in many new friends who have either joined one of our supporting societies or have become new subscribers. I urge you all to acquaint your gardening friends with our publication so that it will become widely known and in great demand.

I wish to express appreciation for the dedication of Harland Hand, Margedant Hayakawa and George Waters, all from the California Horticultural Society. These three, together with myself, met weekly for several months, planning the publication of this issue. Frequently attending our meetings were Dick Hildreth and Emily Brown, of Western Horticultural Society, Helen Markwett, of Strybing Arboretum Society, and, more occasionally, Fred Boutin, of Southern California Horticultural Institute, who came all the way from Los Angeles. And I wish to place special emphasis on the great production and distribution work performed by George Waters and his wife, Olive. The brainstorming and research work by this group was incredibly stimulating and productive, and you, the readers, are now the recipients of what we hope will be your favorite magazine.

Since the beginning of publication of *The Journal of the California Horticultural Society* in 1940, through the succeeding *California Horticultural Journal* (we are proud of both of them), and continuing now with *Pacific Horticulture*, all staff workers and contributors have volunteered their services in their dedication to horticulture. I think this is a remarkable gift to you.

Now, about this present issue: It presents the use of common, rare and exotic bulbs to enhance the beauty of western gardens. All of the authors are well-known, with great experience in their chosen fields.

Wayne Roderick, horticulturist at the University of California, Berkeley, Botanic Garden, is our guest editor, and he has obtained many of the valuable articles. Others came through various members of the Publications Committee, and still others through Fred Boutin of the Southern California Publications Committee.

\*

With this April issue, I terminate my long labor of love as Editor of this magazine; may God bless its future.

Owen Pearce







Then, a group from the California Horticultural Society, Margedant Hayakawa and Victor Reiter, Harland Hand, Dick Hildreth, all past presidents of the Society, and myself, as a past president also, and Elizabeth McClintock, and George Waters himself, formed a committee. We met every week, on a Thursday night I think it was, in Harland Hand's home in El Cerrito for nine months. (That's kind of a not unusual period of gestation.) [laughter] Oh, another one was Laurence Hyman--he was a publications designer. So with that group we formulated the Pacific Horticulture.

The last issue of the California Horticultural Journal was published in October 1975, and the January issue 1976--they were all quarterly journals--the first number of Pacific Horticulture was published. I was named as editor for the first two issues. Then I figured that I'd been at it long enough. I wanted to retire. We all agreed that George should become the editor because he was a very great factor in the production of the journal as assistant editor. So, he has remained editor, and produced an internationally respected publication. He is to be given an award by the Strybing Arboretum Society on the 7th of June of this year, called the Owen Pearce Award--I think I should mention that.

[The following is from an interview with Mr. Pearce conducted by Suzanne Riess of the Regional Oral History Office on July 31, 1990]###

Riess: As we have been sitting here talking we have used terms like "self-taught," "plantsman," "horticulturist"--what are these distinctions?

Pearce: Well, the top layer of plantsmen would be those who've gone through college and studied botany and horticulture and received degrees in that subject. But there are so many of us who although we may have degrees in other lines have taken up horticulture purely as a hobby, and have developed into, as I call myself, advanced horticulturists. Advanced amateur. That's the way I like to look at it. I've learned what I have by attending clubs and reading magazines and so forth. There are a lot of people who have done the same thing as I have and have gone further than I have and have expanded more scientifically, perhaps.

Riess: Does it lead to conflict between the two groups?

Pearce: No. Not unless it's somebody that's jealous of their own prerogatives.

Riess: Seems like a lot of the hybridizing is done by the amateurs.





Pearce: I was going to say that. The Camellia Society<sup>1</sup>, for instance, has a research committee. They are all amateur except for a very few, and they do a lot more in the way of hybridizing and researching the uses of insecticides and things like that. They investigate that. Of course, the main investigation is done in the universities on those subjects, but even so, they do a lot of amateur investigations too.

Riess: Is it correct to say that the Journal was mostly written by amateurs?

Pearce: Yes, I think perhaps, mostly by advanced amateurs. And some of them maybe not even that. The real scientific people, as I have said, want to get credit from the universities. This magazine was not scientific enough to allow for that--nor is Pacific Horticulture.

Riess: Even though academic botanists are on the staff.

Pearce: Yes, like Elizabeth McClintock. Or Mildred Mathias. Or Dr. Andy Leiser up at Davis. There are several men at Davis who have been very helpful, who have been president of Cal Hort, and they use both their professional and amateur ability.

Riess: In the earliest issues of the Journal, the honorary botanical editor was John Thomas Howell. Who was he?

Pearce: He was the successor to Alice Eastwood at the Academy of Sciences.

Riess: And did you really call on him to check manuscripts?

Pearce: Not while I was editor. I think he was so busy as curator that he didn't branch out into this so much. But he was a great teacher. Like Alice Eastwood did, he led clubs and parties out and studied plants in the field. He was very knowledgeable and very interested. Like Alice Eastwood. Everybody loved both of them.

Riess: Horticulture seems like a very social activity.

Pearce: I think you're right. People like to gather together and discuss plants and brag about the plants they've grown and the hybrids that they've made.

Riess: A lot of competition?

Pearce: But not a serious or acrimonious competition. All a friendly competition. They're all friends, concerned about the welfare of the hobby. You're proud of your garden and you like to have expression from your fellow planters of appreciation.



In the old days of Cal Hort--I don't think I have brought this out--there were many gardens of wealthy people who were interested, Robert Menzies. He had a big garden in Marin County. And Frank Duveneck, down on the Peninsula. And Victor Reiter was one of them.

Riess: The Blakes, of course.

Pearce: Yes, but they weren't too active in the society.

And W.B. Clarke in his San Jose nursery developed lilacs. And Charlie Burr, who was more of a--he worked for nurseries. He was more a salesman type. He knew his plants. He didn't have a big garden of his own, but he knew all these things.

Riess: Were the Japanese represented in these groups? I know about Toichi Domoto, of course?

Pearce: There were several good nurserymen, Japanese, and they were always regarded highly.

Riess: But Domoto took leadership roles.

Pearce: He had a higher grade of scientific knowledge than most of them, I think. He was a leader, no question of that. Whatever he undertook to develop, he developed it to a high degree. Like the tree peonies, that was one of his great things.

Riess: What other nurserymen spring to mind?

Pearce: Well, Marshall Olbrich's partner, Lester Hawkins. He's more of a landscape architect. But the two worked together, and Hawkins had a great deal of knowledge. He was a little bit erratic at times. It's too bad that he died, because he had a lot going--.

Riess: Were they particularly interested in California natives?

Pearce: Not particularly. I think they were more interested in getting exotic types of plants, species that were unknown, and developing them.

Riess: Who do you associate the native plant movement with?

Pearce: One would be Marjorie Schmidt. She was excellent in her knowledge of natives.

Riess: Do you remember when suddenly native plants were a fad, almost? Or when you started getting a flood of manuscript about them?



Pearce: I think the fad really started after that first drought ten years ago, and I was out of it altogether, except as editor emeritus of Pacific Horticulture. It was known before, and highly regarded, this native plant business, but the real influx was when the drought came along.

Riess: Did the Journal have a policy of dealing only with things that grew in California?

Pearce: Oh, no. Or I take it back. Yes, we would talk about plants coming from other areas, how they would grow in California. And I think that's one big difference between the California Horticultural Journal and Pacific Horticulture. Pacific Horticulture has quite a bit about gardens all over the world, fine gardens in the United States, eastern United States, and fine gardens in England--George Waters of course is an Englishman.

I know there are people who really don't care much for those types of articles, but they're interesting, just the same.

Riess: Under your editorship there were not so many articles about gardens?

Pearce: Yes, I think it was more about the growing, the actual performance of growing. We did have special articles occasionally about fine gardens. I know Kay Bills wrote one about the Rollins garden up in north Berkeley--Fitzhugh and Betty Rollins.

Riess: How did you get the articles for the Journal when you were editor?

Pearce: I mentioned that we had a very active Publications Committee that met once a month. We discussed future issues, what kind of articles we'd like to have. We had a lot of input there. In other words, a brainstorming session. Then we'd assign certain people to look into a particular one if they're acquainted with that subject. And if we'd get a good report then we'd go after them, write a letter asking for an article, follow up that way.

Riess: That Publications Committee, was that the same as what is called the Editorial Staff?

Pearce: The Editorial Committee. They were members of the Cal Hort Society and they formed this editorial committee. The Editorial Committee and the Publications Committee--it's one and the same.

Riess: And often they were your authors.



Pearce: They would agree that if we came up with a certain subject we would assign these people to take on that and write about it because we knew that they were capable of doing so.

Riess: And willing, as volunteers.

Did you steer clear of editing these people you knew very well?

Pearce: I always went through every article very carefully for punctuation, for phraseology--sometimes it was awfully mixed up. Wayne Roderick, I corrected him one time and he never volunteered for another article! [laughs] I tried to be careful to retain the flavor of the way they wrote and talked, as I've said, but I just wanted to be sure that the grammar was correct.

But Albert Wilson was the one that surprised me, as I wrote in my notes. I wanted his writing to sound like the way he talked.

Riess: Did you have any real set-tos with your authors?

Pearce: The only one I had a real set-to with was Pete Sullivan, as I mentioned [see story on Journal article on Vireya rhododendrons].

Riess: Did you have reader response, letters to the editor?

Pearce: Very few.

Riess: Were there any special problems with women writers?

Pearce: Not at all. Never. Well, Kay Bills was one. She was a little bit--well, I cut an article of hers in two in length, it was just too long. I had warned her, the number of words and number of pages, and she doubled it. [laughs] And she hasn't spoken to me since. But I wouldn't attribute it to women, it was just that personality.

Riess: Did you have to really beat the bushes some years for articles?

Pearce: Our planning method was such that I never really came up against it. I always had something in the offing. I sometimes had to press people.

Riess: Did you ever come up short? If you had a deadline and you didn't have an article, you had a backlog?

Pearce: I was always looking forward to that, and we had articles on the shelf, most of the times. The three trips I took to Europe, the





second two I got somebody to substitute as assistant editor. Jack Napton was one of them. I got behind then, and I never did catch up until we were going to make the change to Pacific Horticulture. I got the pressure on then, [laughs] and I got the last two issues out on time. That was the only problem I ever had.

Riess: You had the longest tenure as editor the Journal ever had.

Pearce: It was teamwork, I could never have done it alone. The committee was just wonderful.

Riess: Did you ever have official connections with UC?

Pearce: Not official, no.

Riess: You had an article by Michael Laurie in the Department of Landscape Architecture.

Pearce: I didn't get that article myself. It might have been Russ Beatty.

Riess: Having an article by a landscape architect, was that an evolution for the magazine?

Pearce: Ernest Wertheim might have been the pusher on that. He was president of Cal Hort for a couple of years after I had been president, and he was quite a demanding pusher. He had quite a German way about him. He was insistent that things were done right, and he had suggestions. He was a man with very, very many ideas in his head, boy, he was! And you had to discard a great many of them. [laughter] I liked that, I liked that very much, but you had to be wise enough to know when to discard them.

Ernest was the one that got me started, actually. When Wertheim became president he appointed me chairman of the Editorial Committee, and that's where it all started.

Riess: Had you been working with writing and words before that?

Pearce: No.

Riess: It came easily?

Pearce: It came easily. I think possibly it came down a little bit from my mother. She was ambitious, wanted to be a newspaperwoman, and she got a job with a newspaper in this little town of Brighton for two years. Then she got married and forgot all about it. But all her life she was taking notes, and putting down her thoughts. It was mostly about Christian Science. [laughs]



Riess: She was a Christian Scientist?

Pearce: She was a Christian Scientist and she was thinking--I give her an awful lot of credit for that--she was thinking all the time, and she wrote and wrote. Nothing ever happened--. She wanted to be a newspaperwoman, but she just never got the chance. Anyway, I think I got some of that ability of hers.

Riess: Were there any connections between the Journal and Sunset?

Pearce: Yes, with Elsa Uppman Knoll. I first knew her in Cal Hort. I talked about her part in the Strybing Arboretum and the Sunset Demonstration Garden. I don't know exactly how it happened, but she was possibly keeping hold of both ends, keeping them acquainted with each other. She was the garden editor of Sunset, and she was keeping in touch with the Arboretum.

Joe Williamson, who has been the garden editor for a long time at Sunset, when we were first talking about forming the new magazine, Pacific Horticulture, we were concerned about the effect that would have at Sunset because they have a garden department there. Joe, and possibly Mel Lane, they said, "You take up where we leave off." That's the way they put it. They carry their garden articles and information up to a certain point with amateurs. Then when you get into advanced amateur, they drop it. They do quite a bit of that, but not too extensive.

So, it was a very, very comfortable relationship there. In fact, I think they still allow, or want, the Pacific Horticultural Foundation Board to meet in their office.

Riess: They took you under their wing?

Pearce: It was not that. There was no influence whatsoever, but Joe has always been a good worker with the Pacific Horticultural Foundation.

Incidentally, the last two years I worked, before I retired, I was with a firm in San Francisco that built up Stanford University an awful lot. And one of the last jobs I was in charge of in building was Sunset's new building. I had complete charge, from the office standpoint, of putting up that building.

Riess: What was the name of the firm?

Pearce: Wagner and Martinez.

The book department was in that building.



- Riess: Were there any other local magazines to approach the Journal in prominence?
- Pearce: No, and as I have mentioned, it was for members only, there was no counter sale in nurseries, for instance.
- Riess: What was the point of that policy?
- Pearce: Well, I think maybe lack of ambition--to spread. The Cal Hort Society to start with was paying the expenses of this magazine and furnishing it to the members. There was no demand from the outside. Vic Reiter was the one that first had the idea, and then Marge Hayakawa--she became president of Cal Hort and her training was in journalism and she took hold and that was really the beginning of Pacific Horticulture.
- Riess: The beginning of wide-spread distribution. And the financing had to change.
- Pearce: Yes. George Waters got a salary, to start with. It was a commercial venture. The Pacific Horticultural Foundation, which was owned, or operated, by the four clubs, was the sole proprietor, subject to confirmation of everything by the societies themselves. They were in control, but they operated separately and there was never any question regarding policies or anything.
- Riess: I've seen in the magazine that there is a group that give money, above and beyond subscriptions.
- Pearce: That's the Friends of Pacific Horticulture.
- Riess: Did you have anything like that?
- Pearce: No.
- Riess: Was the Journal ever at financial risk?
- Pearce: No. The dues were always enough to cover expenses. There was never any question.
- Riess: Even with photographs.
- Pearce: No. And I'm the one that started the photographs, mostly. And I started the photographic covers.
- Riess: And you were often the photographer!
- Pearce: [laughs]



- Riess: Did you know the mysterious James West? Did you have any contacts?
- Pearce: I never met the man, but I heard of him through Vic Reiter, more than anybody else. Vic was a very close friend of his. And I think Eric Walther was too. But all I know about him is what I have seen in the journals which were printed before I became editor.
- Riess: Your assistant editor, John Napton, what did he do?
- Pearce: He worked for Southern Pacific Company, but he was a very fine grower of succulents. In fact, he sponsored classes at San Francisco City College and he worked in their lath houses, or greenhouses, and he was a real authority on succulent plants.
- Riess: Was he of assistance to you?
- Pearce: Well, he took over when I went to Europe on one of those occasions, for one or two issues.
- Riess: Is there anything more you can tell me about the California School of Gardening for Women than what I read in an early Journal?
- Pearce: No, it was abandoned long before I became really interested in gardening. But Elsa Knoll was very enthusiastic about the two women who ran it [Miss Slaney and Miss Skinner]. I remember Mrs. Malcolm Smith over in Marin County was in that class too.
- Riess: Lester Hawkins--I see he wrote on banksia--was he difficult to deal with as an author?
- Pearce: Yes, overbearing in some ways. He wanted to reorganize the whole system of the way we put out the California Horticultural Journal [laughs], so I didn't encourage him for very long.
- Riess: What were his ideas?
- Pearce: I don't remember now. He wanted to boss the whole thing.
- Riess: I guess that can be a problem with volunteers.
- Pearce: That was when he was working in the nursery up there [in Occidental, California] and then he got involved in landscaping for customers in Occidental, and he dropped the whole idea, lost interest in it.
- Riess: Is he related to the Smith & Hawken garden store?





Pearce: I think not. He and Marshall Olbrich, I don't know whether they were partners before, but they were attorneys, and they were disillusioned or something about their attorney business, and they both decided they liked plants, and so they went into that.

Riess: One of your guest editors was Frederick Boutin.

Pearce: Frederick Boutin, he was assistant at the Huntington Gardens in Pasadena, and he resigned that to go into business for himself, just before he would have been made the general manager there. He was a very knowledgeable, erudite, likeable man.

Riess: And another guest editor was Roy Hudson.

Pearce: Roy Hudson, he had his whole career at Golden Gate Park. He was a very positive person. And very proud of what he had done.

When Roy was made the director of Strybing Arboretum we had just had an article in the Journal about Vic Reiter. Vic had been given the annual award from Cal Hort, and Vic wanted to write up his own account of his life. He had put a lot of thought into it, and he'd rather do it right himself than have anybody else do it wrong. [laughing] Roy, I think, was envious of that, so when he became the director of the Strybing he brought in a long article by himself telling his life story.

Riess: Were the Cal Hort plant awards a regular feature in the Journal?

Pearce: That was an annual feature. They had an annual award to the person--not necessarily a member, but usually--who was valuable in support of the Society and of horticulture. They had what is called the Rixford award which is awarded to a worker for the Society, without publicity, without any title--that award was given in the shape of a book of the awardee's own choice. And then they had plant awards of various types, sometimes two or three a year, sometimes six or seven.

Riess: Did you have a model in mind of what the Journal might look like? Did you have in the library over at Strybing journals from East Coast horticultural groups?

Pearce: No, not particularly. I had seen and subscribed to different magazines and so forth. In fact I got tired of most of them. [laughs] Most of them were dirt gardener magazines, a good many of them. And I think we were just a little above that. A lot of people even now tell me that it was kind of prestigious in its way.

Riess: What would you say were the hazards of a all-volunteer situation?



Pearce: The main hazard was that the university people were inhibited from contributing. Also, there were some people who just said, "I can't write."

Riess: How was printing handled? Was that volunteer?

Pearce: Oh no, we paid for that. We had Howell-North, they were our printers for quite a while.

Riess: Did they give you any special break?

Pearce: I don't think so. But Bob Howell was awfully nice to us, and he went overboard. I've forgotten now why we started with them.

But then Wakefield Baker, of Baker, Hamilton got on the board, and they had a certain printer who did all of their printing of all their catalogues--

Riess: What is Baker, Hamilton?

Pearce: That was a big wholesale hardware firm over in San Francisco.

This fellow was the Baker. And he suggested, as a member of the board and president of the Strybing Arboretum Society, that we discuss it with the printer that was doing their printing. And we did get a lower rate, but it was a kind of "have to do it" suggestion. But I hated to leave Howell-North. This other printer didn't do quite the good printing job that Howell-North did, but it worked out all right.

Riess: How was the design of the magazine handled? The covers, for instance?

Pearce: That was up to us. And almost immediately I started having a photographic cover, because I thought that lent such prestige to the magazine. And we changed the position of different parts of the magazine at different times. I always made the mockup. The printer would furnish me with a little booklet of empty pages the size of ours and I would cut out the lines, and put where the pictures were to go, and give the titles. I did that all myself. It was a one-man job. [laughs]

Riess: Was Cal Hort working always on developing membership? Or were they fairly passive?

Pearce: Fairly passive. When I first joined there were about four hundred members and they met at the Merchant's Exchange up on the 13th floor. We'd have two or three hundred people, and the material that was brought in from these private gardens, big ones, you'd



come in and you'd feel like you were in a florist shop. It was exciting.

Riess: So you didn't need more members for that part of things. But on the other hand, expansion must have somehow been an issue.

Pearce: Not expansion so much as keeping up. As time went on the people got older and we couldn't get younger people in. I think that same problem still exists. Younger people needed to get baby sitters, and it's too expensive for them to do that. We found that we were getting pretty old.

And then the hippie period came in--I wouldn't call them "earth first" because that's a bad name right now, but the hippies were down to earth. And a lot of those people came in and were interested and they started their own gardens, and some of them started their own nurseries. And that's what saved Cal Hort, more than anything else. That's my point of view, at least.

Riess: In the meantime the magazine had taken off on its own.

Pearce: Yes, absolutely separate from any of the four societies, completely independent in functioning. But all Pacific Horticultural Foundation board members are appointed by, and represent, the four sponsoring societies. All members of those societies receive Pacific Horticulture automatically.

Riess: Have the other three societies had the same struggle to stay alive that Cal Hort has?

Pearce: No, not really. Strybing Arboretum Society hasn't had that problem because they have gone to society and wealthy people and made a huge success out of that society. I feel very proud that I had part in organizing that one.

The Cal Hort Society, the Western Hort, and the Southern California Hort Institute all are dependent on their monthly meetings. Strybing Arboretum is not. That's a big organization with many, many facets. They tried to have monthly meetings. Finally they got their education committee to have monthly meetings, not strictly as the Arboretum Society, but as education meetings, programs. So that's the only group that's really risen above the others. [end Pearce/Riess interview]



F. Owen Pearce Award##

Pearce:

As I have said before, I was the first president of the Strybing Arboretum Society, which was formed in 1955. In 1980 we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of that Society. Of course, I attended. It was an annual business meeting of the Society, and a party, also. During the meeting, Jack Spring, general manager of the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, got up and started to talk. I listened for a little while, and then, all of a sudden, I realized that he was talking about me. I wondered what it was all about.

Finally, he said that the Society was awarding me the first annual award of the F. Owen Pearce Award for Horticulture. I was just knocked off my feet, although I was sitting down. I couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it. He gave me this award--a beautifully designed award with a colored flower border all around the edge. I had to get up, and acknowledge it, of course, and I said--even then, I couldn't believe it, and still right now I don't feel like I'm as worthy of it. Well, that was the situation there.

Since then, the award has been given to really great horticulturists, most of them widely known. The first year, it was given to Victor Reiter. I remember telling him he deserved this honor much more than I did, because when I was with Victor I felt like a pupil of Socrates, listening to the master. I thought him so wonderful.

Then, it was given to Dr. Elizabeth McClintock, the very fine botanist and a great friend of the Strybing Arboretum Society, and curator at the Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. Mrs. Cabot [Peggy] Brown and Mrs. Hillyer [Emily] Brown, both very active and fine horticulturists in the Arboretum Society--they were both given the award the same year. (Their husbands were brothers, that's why they have that same name.)

The next year it was Lurline Matson Roth, known as the owner of Filoli, a residence near Woodside, down the Peninsula. Then to David Feathers, an internationally known camellia expert who lives in Lafayette. Then Peter Sullivan, a breeder of rhododendrons, particularly Vireya rhododendrons, in the Arboretum nursery. Then Gladys Smith, a botanist who has taught botany in the University of California and written books on horticulture and published one on the botanical aspects of Muir Woods.

Then, wonder of wonders, Lady Bird Johnson! I pretty near fell over when it was announced that I was going to give her the





award. She is a very gracious woman, and deserved it because of the great things she has done for wild flowers all over the United States.

Last year, Toichi Domoto, an eminent nurseryman in Hayward, who has done an awful lot for horticulture, received the award. This coming year, as I've said before, George Waters and his wife, Olive Rice Waters, are to receive the award. All of these awards, I feel, are more of an honor to me than to them. So, that's the story of the F. Owen Pearce Award.

I have very little activity in the Arboretum now, just because I have no means of transportation to get over there, and I regret it very much. But I do occasionally go over to eminent affairs like the plant sale a couple of weeks ago, the best of all plant sales in the Bay Area. I went over on a theme walk at the Arboretum, the theme being rhododendrons, and I spent an hour-and-a-half or two hours conducting people around, showing the rhododendrons in blossom.

A couple more honors that I have received from other organizations: I was the second president of the East Bay Garden Center, which was actually started by Charlie Phillips, a very great grower of azaleas in Oakland. In 1971, that East Bay Garden Center made me their Man of the Year, which was quite an honor.

#### Dunsmuir House, East Oakland

Pearce: Another outfit with whom I have worked a lot was Dunsmuir House in East Oakland. I wrote a letter around 1968, I think it was, I'm not sure of dates here. Mr. Maurice Sumner, a very close friend of mine, and an eminent rhododendron expert--he has received a gold medal from the American Rhododendron Society--wanted to find someplace to grow hybrid rhododendrons for members of the California chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. We heard about Dunsmuir House, which the City of Oakland had purchased from the Hellman estate some years before. It was going to go on the market, probably to be used by a real estate developer for housing.

There were two or three people, particularly in radio, the Montclarion, a newspaper in Montclair--we were beginning to get some publicity on that. I had heard about Dunsmuir from the head of the park department in Oakland, whom we had talked to about getting a place for rhododendrons. He suggested this and said, "Maybe that would work out." So, I wrote a letter to the East Bay



Garden Center and told them about the crisis at Dunsmuir, and that it ought to be saved, and I thought that the East Bay Garden Center would be probably the most logical group to try to influence the Oakland City Council.

I wrote that letter and woke up the East Bay Garden Center. Lloyd Eisenhour, who was president, at that time, of the Garden Center, took it in hand, and a group of us organized the Dunsmuir --I forgotten the exact name of it--but the Dunsmuir group to save the place. We worked with the City Council. Lloyd Eisenhour was a very wonderful and energetic man. He took charge of it, and all as a result of my letter.

I served on the board for three years. We did save Dunsmuir House. The board was very active, and we raised a good deal of money in the first three years and did a lot of reconstruction work in the house. My main purpose in doing it was to try to make a second Butchart Gardens out there. Ruth Gilkey was on the board also, and she had the same idea. We worked on it, but we could never put it over, because the house seemed to be more important all the time.

A. Lawyer: That's too bad. We had a similar experience there. The Iris Society wanted to plant iris there, but then no one would take care of them.

Pearce: That's true. We did get the president of the California Chapter of the Rhododendron Society, Hadley Osborn, to help us in organizing the board. He got one rhododendron grower from down in the Santa Cruz area to bring up some well-grown rhododendrons, six or eight years old, which were extra stock. Hadley and a couple of other people and I went out and planted, I think, four hundred rhododendrons. And then it was a question of upkeep and water, and the city wouldn't do anything to save it, and we had to do it through the organization.

It finally got where I just didn't have anymore time or patience, really, and I resigned. But, we had organized the many events that they have, like the Christmas and Easter at Dunsmuir. I remember one very rainy Christmas I got out there in the rain and helped people. They came in droves in spite of the rain. I got pretty wet in helping them to get from the busses into the house. I feel like we did a lot of good there.

A. Lawyer: That's nice. I didn't know your part in that at all.



Oakland Spring Garden Show

Pearce: I realize now that I have accomplished quite a bit, but as I went along in life, everything seemed to be average and normal and not particularly outstanding. I don't know if it's really outstanding now, but I have accomplished a lot, made an awful lot of good friends, for instance on this Businessman's Gardens Club where I've been program chairman for forty years. We have a meeting once a week, and I've made friends with so many people, and through the editorial work that I did, and still do, I knew so many people, that I can call on them and they're always glad to give us a program. And we've never had to pay for that.

One of my great experiences was the wonderful Oakland Spring Garden shows at the Oakland Auditorium. I joined the Alameda County Floral Society in 1947. I remember all of this because that's when I built my house in Orinda and I met Harold Manor--I mentioned him--who got me to join the Alameda County Floral Society, and two other groups. Mrs. Elma Connelly was the driving force, I think, with the Alameda County Floral Society. I've talked about that.

The great, important duty, I would say, that that society performed was being in charge of the bench show at the California Spring Garden Show. This bench show was about three hundred feet long. Generally, it was indoors on the outer extremities behind the main garden show. The society received all of the specimen flowers or trusses or potted plants which individuals from all over bring in for judging, hoping to get a ribbon for them, or a place.

They had, I don't know how many, several hundred dollars worth of pots--beautiful blue, glazed pots of all shapes and sizes. People would bring in single rose buds or flowers, sometimes chrysanthemum even though they were out of season. They had a big exhibition of the latest and the oldest varieties of irises, of azaleas, rhododendrons, plants that were in full blossom. Just a tremendous thing. Elma Connelly was in charge of all of this. It was one of the main parts of the East Bay Garden Show.

A few years after I joined it, I was elected president of the Cal Hort Society. That society also had a bench show or an outside plot at the Spring Garden Show. So, I worked on two different portions: first, the Alameda County Floral, and then the Cal Hort show.



For Cal Hort, we had to design our own show. They would often make a garden right there--a rock garden, for instance. We had one very good rock garden at that show, about ten feet long, four feet wide, up against the wall. They brought in several yards of good soil and rocks, and built up a beautiful rock garden plant exhibit.

Howard Gilkey, who was a landscape architect and designer genius, was the driving enthusiast for these flower shows. His designing was just out-of-the-world. It was really a great pleasure to have known him. I got to know him quite well in the Oakland Men's Garden Club, him and Dave Feathers and Charlie Phillips and some of the others that contributed so much to the shows. So, that was a great experience. I guess it was about a ten-year period where I contributed to those garden shows.

A. Lawyer: I think they were the most beautiful shows that you could imagine.

Pearce: I don't think there were any in the world to compare. I've been to the Chelsea show, and that is spectacular. But it is a bench show, in a tent, and every inch of its displays are on good-sized benches. They build up, for instance, rock gardens there beautifully. The Oakland Spring Garden Show was what I call homogeneous, perhaps. You could come in and get a whole view of this tremendous exhibit, so beautifully designed, sometimes with a big redwood tree built up, or, I remember, there was a triple waterfall one time.

I had the privilege one time of taking three Australian ladies who were visiting a local rhododendron show. When I brought them into the hall and they got the overview right from the start, they just couldn't believe it. I felt like I was really a boy scout doing my good deed that day.

Incidentally, I never mentioned that I was a boy scout leader for about two or three years. I had my own troop, and I got a big joy out of that. That was at Cleveland School in Oakland. I was a troop scout master. I had a lot of fun with that, too.

A. Lawyer: I don't know how you had time to do all these things!

Pearce: I wonder that myself.





Photographing--Mountains and Flowers

A. Lawyer: Now we're going to talk about your photography.

Pearce: I was pretty much interested in photography even as a young man because I joined the camera club at Berkeley High School the last year that I was in high school. We went out on hikes and took pictures. I had a very cheap, little camera that Eastman put out. Film size was one and five-eighths by two and a half inches. But I took a lot of pictures with it.

I started going up into the High Sierra and even used it there. Then I got a better camera, not much better, but better anyway, for the next trips into the Sierra, and I thought I was doing pretty well. I went on one trip where seven of us were on a pack trip. One of them was a German young man who was very enthusiastic about photography himself. He had taken a course in the Extension Division at the University in Oakland. (Extension Division instruction was given in Oakland then.)

This young fellow, Hans Bertelsman was his name, kept telling me how to take pictures, because he'd had this course, and he thought he knew everything. At least, that's the way I felt. I was pretty piqued. Well, after the trip was over we had a get-together to show the pictures, and I guess he did know everything, because the pictures he took were so superior to mine that I enrolled in the next Extension Division course. For two or three years I took all the courses they had there, both in technical work and in artistic composition. I enjoyed that very much.

It was black and white photography at first. When I studied architecture in college we had to do quite a bit of work in art, design, and so forth. So I had the basics of good photography, I guess, without knowing it. Then I joined a camera club, and got into competitions.

The students at those classes formed a society called the San Francisco Photographic Society. I joined that, and the members of it were a group of the highest caliber photographers in the area. I got an awful lot of wonderful help from those people. We'd meet once a month at different places, different homes.

John Paul Edwards was one of the greatest. He had prints accepted and exhibited in salons all over the world. We became pretty good friends. Incidentally, he was a rose grower, a rose authority. He had written a book on roses for Standard Oil Company, which became Chevron. He kind of took me under his wing, which was awfully nice. Then Christine Fletcher, also, who was a



very fine photographer, and a man name Dassonville, who produced a photographic paper that was superior. He was a member of the club. We'd criticize pictures, and I learned an awful lot from them.

That society was rather limited in scope. After three or four years it passed out of the picture. Then I joined the Oakland Camera Club, which met at Chabot School, right near where I lived. I kept going to that for a good many years. When I moved out to Orinda I dropped that. Well, no, I didn't--I stayed there for quite awhile, but I got tired of that kind of activity because it was very repetitive and just the same things over and over.

I built a little darkroom in the attic of my place on Chabot Court. And in the house in Orinda I had a separate darkroom, and that was a great pleasure there. Sometimes when I felt a little bit tired or even worried about business, I'd go down there and start enlarging films or pictures. It relieved me an awful lot, and I got some pretty good results.

When the color film came along, I was on a pack trip, around 1938. I remember these dates pretty well for some reason. One of the fellows had the first colored film I had seen, and a movie camera with colored movies. I was fascinated when I saw the results, both still and movie. So, I got another cheap camera, good enough, and started out on color work. That's developed into a great hobby. I've got, I guess, five or six thousand slides here. Most of them, of course, I never look at anymore.

A. Lawyer: We've seen a slide show that you gave. Really fine pictures.

Pearce: My favorite of all is the scenes of flowers of the High Sierra. I'm going to give that again here [Rossmoor] in a few weeks, I think. So, that's how that evolved. I came out to Rossmoor and I joined the camera club here. I had been in the Oakland Camera Club.

I got tired of camera clubs. Have you ever joined one?

L. Lawyer: No, I'm not a joiner. I don't like being regimented.

Pearce: Yes, well, they have judges, and each judge likes a particular type of photography. So, all the exhibitors would find out who the judge was going to be for the next meeting, and then they'd get the right kind of pictures. I didn't do that.

When I got to Rossmoor I'd heard that judging rigamarole so much that I was absolutely tired of it. Judges had to repeat the



same old thing over and over. So, I dropped out. But, I think that I was having more fun just doing slide shows, and I spent a lot of time at that. That worked in with the flowers.

A. Lawyer: What kind of a camera did you get for the color work? I was interested in that.

Pearce: I don't remember the name now. It was a low-priced camera of its kind. Eventually, I got an Exacta. And that's where I've done most of my work. I got my Exacta right after the war. My wife's brother-in-law, her sister's husband, had a business on the waterfront in San Francisco.

##

Pearce: He had a friend on a ship, one of the engineers, and he asked him to buy an Exacta in Japan or some Eastern country where he was going. It was a beautiful camera, and I used it for many years, until I lost it on a trip with the Rossmoor group one time about ten years ago.

We were on the train going from Durango to Silverton in Colorado. On the way back, looking out the window, I could see as we went around the turns there would be a beautiful picture of the train in this canyon. So, I went out to the platform, and I opened the flap of the camera case, and the camera fell out and over, down on the tracks, and I could see it bouncing down the canyon, down into the stream, maybe a hundred feet below. Oh, I was sick. But it was insured. I got another camera, and it was just as good, another Exacta.

[added later by Mr. Pearce] After completing three years as president of the California Horticultural Society I began to give programs to garden clubs and other types of clubs, mostly on plant subjects. I acquired a library of black and white photos, plus a collection of colored slides, all taken by me. With these as a background I have been giving programs, with and without slides, on garden subjects and travels to Europe and in this country for forty or more years. During some years I gave as many as twenty-five or thirty lectures, with fewer in the last ten years. They were given to garden clubs, private societies, convalescent hospitals, and on request, in private homes. I should judge I have given a total of three or four hundred programs covering such subjects as growing rhododendrons, rock garden plants, California native plants, European travels, etc. Sometimes I have been paid for the lectures, but more often not.

This activity has helped me to become a program chairman of several clubs, mainly Cal Hort Society and the San Francisco







Owen Pearce in the mountains, 1938, and in the garden, 1955.







Owen and Muriel Pearce,  
Echo Lake, 1970.



Maurice Sumner presents the 1972 Annual Award of the  
California Horticultural Society to F. Owen Pearce.



Business Men's Garden Club. I have chaired the Program Committee of the latter for over thirty years, with the help of a committee, and have arranged programs for each Monday for ten months of the year. I am retiring from that post this year. [end of addition]

### Mountaineering

A. Lawyer: Now, I thought we ought to talk more about your mountaineering experiences.

Pearce: Well, I think from boyhood I've always liked hiking. I remember the first long hike I ever took was when we were living in Corvallis, and I took about a fourteen mile hike up to the top of a peak and got lost, which was only incidental, of course, but it was a good hike, and I enjoyed it immensely. We studied some flowers on the way. I had just finished a one-semester course in botany in high school, so I was looking at the flowers, and I saw a columbine for the first time. I just gloried in the beauty of that little red and yellow flower growing wild.

Then we moved to Berkeley, and I became friends with a group that liked to hike. We travelled over in Marin County quite a lot and covered the trails there. My first hike over there was from Sausalito to Stinson Beach over the Dipsea Trail, a seven-and-a-half-mile trail. Eventually, after a jogging training period, I made that in an hour and twenty minutes. Pretty good for me, but the men who run the Dipsea race, which was an annual event then, did it in about forty-eight minutes. The record is somewhere near there, about a half an hour faster than I could do it. I ran up the hills, too. I was in good shape.

This led to that pack trip that I've mentioned with a friend who had worked as a packer at Giant Forest during summer vacations while he was in college. That started the trips into the High Sierra. All together, I took ten two-week animal pack trips. Burros on several occasions, and a mule and a horse on other occasions. Twice, two or three times, with the Sierra Club.

I went on a burro trip once where we had eleven burros to take care of, plus a horse. There were twenty-two or twenty-five, I think, in the party with the Sierra Club. The leader was experienced in handling animals, but I knew about as much as he did about it, I think. Burros can be very annoying, frustrating. You let them out to feed in the evening, and you have a bell on the neck of two or three of them, but you have a hard time finding them in the morning. Usually the horse we would hobble so it



wouldn't go very far away. But, we had a lot of fun with the animals.

I admire the backpackers of today. They can go with a lot less trouble.

A. Lawyer: Did you do any cooking on those trips?

Pearce: Oh, yes. My friend Ralph Whalley, the leader, he was a good camp cook, but he insisted on using a Dutch oven. He would bake biscuits in a Dutch oven as our substitute for bread and it was very wonderful. I always questioned the heaviness of a Dutch oven, but we had animals to carry it, so it really didn't matter very much. One year he couldn't go, so I got a reflector oven. A very light thing. You hardly noticed the weight. That worked beautifully. I made biscuits from Bisquick. I didn't have to worry about baking powder and that kind of stuff. We even one year made a cake and it worked wonderfully. My wife taught me how to make the cake. Prepared flour, of course. Really not much of a problem.

On the Sierra Club burro trip, we made a pie with the reflector oven. We had some girls along. I didn't know about baking pies, and they baked apple pie. We had apples, and it was good.

A. Lawyer: What peaks have you climbed?

Pearce: My first experience with climbing a peak--I wanted to climb up a fourteen thousand foot peak because the Sierra Club had a fourteen thousand foot club. Anybody who had climbed five fourteen thousand foot peaks were entitled to some kind of certificate or something like that. So, in 1935 it was, I went back to my hometown in Brighton, Colorado, where my father was still living. I spent about a week up at Estes Park in the Rocky Mountain National Park and I climbed Long's Peak there. That was over fourteen thousand feet, so I got my first high peak there.

Then, in late '31, I think it was, I climbed Mount Shasta. That was a rough one. That was really hard because it was a six thousand foot climb. We started at four o'clock in the morning after a good night's sleep. The first part of it was up a steep snow bank which had frozen during the night. This was Fourth of July, but at that altitude, eight or nine thousand feet, the snow had a hard crust on top.

We rented sort of a boathook type of rod where we could put the hook on the end into the snow to help pull us up. When the wind came down the mountain--and boy did it come down--we could





turn our backs to it on this icy slope and stick the point of the hook--it had a point and curve, too--we'd stick that in and lean against it and just brace ourselves against that cold, bitter wind. We had cleats on our shoes so that we could climb.

We got up finally to the top. That is, we thought we had reached the top until we got there, and found we were on the edge of a small crater at the actual top of the peak. In the middle of this small crater was another little peak, so we hadn't reached the top yet. But we were all so much all in that we decided that we were not going to try that.

Then we looked at our watches and found we had been climbing from four o'clock in the morning till one o'clock--nine hours--and hadn't stopped for lunch. So, we got out our lunch and had that, and we ran up that last peak. Funny, Mount Shasta, it's a great climb, and you like to have that feeling of having been there, but you're so far above everything that the view--it's so distant. You can appreciate the distant view, but I don't like to take pictures where everything is so far away that nothing turns out. I think we saw Mount Diablo from there.

A. Lawyer: Mount Diablo is the place where you can see the farthest in all directions in the whole world.

Pearce: I know we saw Mount Diablo because it's the only mountain in that area. We could see the Sutter Buttes very plainly and then down to Mount Diablo.

Anyway, we enjoyed that. Those experiences have given me a great love for mountains. When I went to Europe, I couldn't climb mountains then because I had to be with my wife. But they have a lot of places in Europe where you go up on cables, and I got up into some pretty high altitudes there, up around Mount Blanc and the Matterhorn. We got up into the middle of those mountains, and it's just terrific.

A. Lawyer: So, mostly your motivation was to see the view, for instance.

Pearce: See the view, take pictures, and sometimes just for the accomplishment of having climbed that.

Those were two fourteen-thousand foot peaks. Then, in the High Sierra, I climbed one called Mount Sill, which is 14,000 feet. That was quite a climb. I tried that two different years. The first year we got off the trail and didn't make it. Then, we made it the next time.





Then, we climbed Mount Whitney. That was really an easy climb. Many people climb it now starting from the Owens Valley side, and they go up to an elevation of about 9,000 feet by auto. Then they have to climb the next five thousand feet. That's an awful lot of climbing, but many people do it. We came over the John Muir Trail from the north, and we were camped at about 11,500 feet. It was an easy trail, not a steep trail, from our camp the next morning to go to Mount Whitney. No problem at all. We enjoyed that. The trail to Mount Whitney parallels a ridge with other peaks alongside. We came by one, Mount Muir, which is 14,025 feet. It was only a couple hundred feet to climb from the trail there, so I made my fifth fourteen thousand foot peak then!

Altogether I made ten two-week pack trips with animals, plus many short weekend trips, also with animals, and we covered most of the John Muir Trail.

The Sierra and the other mountains gave me the chance to photograph and also to study flowers. I learned a lot about the High Sierra flowers. Then we bought a cabin at Echo Lake. The altitude there is--first, that's near Lake Tahoe, just fifteen or twenty miles or less by air from the southwestern corner of Lake Tahoe, and it's at seventy-five hundred feet against Lake Tahoe's six thousand. That fifteen hundred feet makes quite a difference in the character of the mountains. I bought that in 1944 and I gave it to my daughter, so we still have it in the family.

I enjoyed hiking up into Desolation Valley, climbing up Pyramid Peak. My family learned how to water-ski. I tried it once, I think I was too old. I fell off. All I could do is get started and then I'd go under. We didn't have a boat of our own, at least at that time, so I didn't have a really good chance. Echo Lake gave us the opportunity, and gave my wife an opportunity to enjoy that high country which she never could have done on our animal pack trips, which was all walking and climbing.

The first two or three trips we took up in the mountains, up to the High Sierra, I didn't realize it, but I just wasn't in shape. We'd go along with the boys, and they start climbing up over a three thousand foot pass, which is common, and I couldn't keep up with them. So, I finally decided that before I go up the next time, I needed to start jogging in the morning. President [John F.] Kennedy made jogging popular later. I started out in February going up a hill near my place in Oakland. By summertime I didn't know for sure whether I was in shape, but I could out-climb a horse, and the horses were faster than the boys. It made a big difference.



Music

A. Lawyer: If you think we're about finished with that part, let's talk some about your hobbies.

Pearce: Well, music was one in which I was interested. I started taking piano lessons in Brighton when I was about eight years old. My teacher, Professor Kidder, had a goatee I remember, and I was a little afraid of him. He would come down from Denver once a week to give lessons to the children in Brighton. I think it was about a year, year-and-a-half that I took with him.

We had one recital, I remember. I had to play one of those primary pieces and I had to do it by memory. My mother was afraid that I couldn't do it. So, she made me take the music to the piano when I played in this hall, with about maybe a hundred people listening. I went through with it without opening up the music, and I turned right in front of everybody and said, "I told you I could play it without the music!" to my mother.

Then, we moved to Spokane, and my mother bought a piano when we moved there. I took lessons for about six months. We had a player piano, and we had a lot of rolls of different music, good music and I was fascinated with it. And we played it over and over again. I got the music for them, and started to learn those. I thought, "Gee, that's wonderful, I can play these kinds of things."

Then we moved, and we went to Corvallis where Oregon State is --Oregon Agricultural College then. I took six months from a teacher there, and she found what I could play and said, "Well, there's nothing much I can do for you unless you want to go into it really. You've gotten as far as you can with teaching unless you want really to go for fine music." I said I wanted to go for fine music. So, I bought the Sonata Pathetique by Beethoven, and she taught me that. I've played it ever since, particularly the second movement. I think of all piano music that I know of, it's my favorite. It's just a beautiful thing. I've played it ever since. I played it yesterday, by the way. Not very well because my fingers aren't too good, but I did get by for my own purposes.

After that period of lessons, when I was about sixteen years old, I practiced myself. My mother always had a piano around, and I just practiced myself, sometimes an hour a day, sometimes longer, sometimes less, just reading music from albums we had gotten.



Then, at Berkeley High my senior year, I became very close with Harold "Red" Plummer. He was a genius really in music. He played clarinet and saxophone and piano, and he was in Horace Heidt's band. I used to go over to visit him. He instructed me how to play jazz. I hadn't tried that before, so I played that for quite a while at the boarding house that my mother ran. She had girls, about ten or twelve girls, I guess. Every evening after dinner, I'd go in and sit down for an hour and play for dancing. It was fun.

A. Lawyer: Was your mother a pianist, too?

Pearce: No. Well, she could play very slightly.

A. Lawyer: So, mostly she got it just for you children, so that you could have musical education.

Pearce: Yes. My sister took lessons a lot longer than I did. But, somehow she couldn't get it as quickly as I did. Some facility just wasn't born in her. My brother tried it, too, but he wasn't interested in it much at all. But my mother bought me, as a wedding present, a Steinway baby grand which you see here. That was, as I say, after we were married, and I didn't have any time to do any of that jazz stuff. I played it now and then, but I cared more for good music. I learned some difficult pieces, like the Moonlight Sonata. I could play the whole thing. The third movement is very difficult, but I learned to play that. And Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso--I don't know whether you know that. That's a lot of fun too. I got to know how to play that pretty well.

When I met Helen Sizer here at Rossmoor--and she is a top musician--she got me interested in four different groups: the Diablo Symphony, which is a volunteer symphony. They play excellent music, and they have crowds down at the Gateway Clubhouse in Rossmoor and other places, two hundred and fifty or so listening. And the Rossmoor Music Association, which has many different types of concerts; the Rossmoor Chamber Music Association, another one, is chamber music. I'm on the board of directors of that one.

The one that I enjoy more than any other, I think, is the Contra Costa Performing Arts Society. They have many members who are performing members. It's surprising the degree of proficiency in the Society. Some of them are very, very gifted people. The concerts are free, and they don't get nearly the attendance that they should. They've got about four hundred members in the Society, but they have a hundred in attendance at a concert if they're lucky.



As I've just said, my mother gave me a Steinway baby grand as a wedding present even though she ran a boarding house. It's surprising that she made enough money to do that. She was a good manager and she worked like a Trojan and she made enough money to give me that piano.

When my sister was married, she gave her a baby grand piano. Not a Steinway, I've forgotten the name of it. It was a good one. My brother, when he graduated from college he didn't want a piano, so she gave him a 1924 Buick. Of course, my sister retained her piano till she passed away, and I still have mine. My brother--his car was finished in three or four years. [laughter]

### Family--Children

A. Lawyer: We haven't talked about your own children. Your daughter?

Pearce: Barbara, "Bobbie" to me, was born in 1925. She was a beautiful little girl--and all through her life. We gave her opportunities: girl scouting, dancing lessons. I remember, she started dancing when she was about eight years old, and at the end of the first year, we went to her recital.

###

Here she was, my little eight year old daughter up there in her tutu, you know. I had the worst time. That was my daughter, and yet she was a person on her own. First time I realized that she was an independent personality. It struck me all of a sudden. She was performing on her own. To heck with her father! That was a funny feeling.

She was in the first kindergarten class in the newly-built Chabot School on Chabot Road. Went through the seventh or eighth grades there, then went to junior high school at Claremont on College Avenue, and then to University High, which was a very fine school. She and a close friend walked, oh, I guess about a mile and a half every morning and evening up and down Claremont Avenue in Oakland. Imagine youngsters doing that now. They don't do this thing.

We sent her for one year to C.O.P. Now it's U.O.P. It was the College of the Pacific in Stockton, and now it's University of the Pacific. It was during the World War II, and they had the program for the Navy at C.O.P. then. To heck with the girls. They were getting money from the government for these sailors, and





they paid very little attention to the girls. They were noted for music there, but she wasn't interested in music.

She came home that Christmas and told us that she was engaged. With all those sailors around! She had three roommates. One of them had been married that fall, just met the boy, and after just a few weeks they got married. And another one was engaged. Then Barbara announced her engagement to this fellow, Bob. She invited him for a New Year's party at our place in Oakland. He came down and we met him. He wasn't very impressive, he couldn't converse or get along. My wife Muriel could see that, but they went back still engaged.

Along about April sometime, I think it was on her birthday--she was born on the eighteenth of April, the anniversary of the earthquake of 1906--I called her up to wish her a happy birthday. She says, "Daddy, I've broken off my engagement to Bob. Aren't you glad?" She knew we didn't like him.

Then she met her future husband. She went to Sunday school with a friend, and at a church activity--I think it was down in Piedmont--she met this young man, Elbert Wayne, and he was a lot of fun and quite brilliant. He enlisted in the Air Corps. They were going together pretty steadily, and they wrote letters all the time. She realized she liked this man pretty well. So, when he came home after the war they just flew into each other's arms. He came up to the door at our house. I let him in and called Barbara. She saw him and bang!

They were married the next year. He finished college on a government grant and became an engineer, worked for me for quite a while in our construction firm. Then he went off on his own. They had a happy life. They had one child, Linda, who was a very brilliant young lady. Just a wonderful young girl. We loved her very much. When she was about eight years old, she contracted juvenile diabetes. I didn't know how serious that was at the time. But one friend of mine, a doctor, said he didn't want to be a harbinger of bad news, but this diabetes, the probabilities are that she won't live past forty. She was very good about taking insulin, and all that sort of stuff. At times she was forgetful, but generally speaking, she was all right.

I took her and her mother on one of my trips to Europe. The four of us spent two months over there, and Linda, who later became blind, told me later that that was one of the most wonderful things that she had experienced in her life, that trip to Europe, two months with us and her mother. She and her mother got reacquainted then. They really hadn't gotten closely acquainted because Linda had been with her friends and all that



sort of stuff. But two months together on the tour and they were inseparable after that.

Anyway, she became blind at twenty-five. It was quite a trauma. She got a guide dog a year later. It just changed her whole outlook on life. She was a tremendous influence on people. Went around lecturing with a friend of hers who was also blind, lecturing to doctors, nurses, associates in some clubs, about how people should react towards the blind people, how they should treat the blind people. Not like the clerk at the Safeway store where she went in one time with her guide dog. She wrote her check--they have a little form that they use on checkbooks which guides their writing of the checks--and the clerk took a look at it and says, "May I see your driver's license, please?" And Linda said, "Do you really want me to drive?" That's the way she would give the lecture. She died at thirty-two, eight years ago. It was really an awful, awful thing.

A. Lawyer: That was their only child?

Pearce: They adopted another child ten years later, ten years younger, when it was three weeks old, Nancy. Nancy is just a treasure, just a beautiful person. She went to U.O.P. First, at sixteen, she became a foreign exchange student. When it was announced that she had succeeded in getting the recommendation, we hoped it would be some romantic country like Italy or Yugoslavia, or something like that. Instead, it came up Bolivia. We said, "Where's Bolivia?" She went down there for a full year at sixteen and lived with a family of six children and a mother and father. Two of the middle ones were close to her age. Oh, it was really a wonderful education and opportunity for her. Nancy was with these people for a full year, and she graduated from high school down there and came back in February and graduated with her class in Moraga at the high school there.

Then after her Spanish experience--she could talk Spanish fluently, very, very well; the parents and brother and sisters down in Bolivia had been very strict in seeing that she pronounced correctly, no accent--she went to Diablo Valley College here for one year. Then she heard about a Spanish-speaking college at U.O.P. So, she went up the last three years to school at Stockton. In that college forty percent of the students are Spanish-American, from Central America and South America. She became a leader of the whole group there. She had a wonderful time. Really, quite brilliant. She was valedictorian of the class.

She got acquainted with one of the boys from Peru. They got along so beautifully. He stayed in this country for a year



working after he finished college. He got two degrees in college at the same time--one in electrical engineering; I've forgotten what the other was. After a year of working, he went down to Peru and worked for his father and came back up here for a vacation. They announced their engagement and got married. She went down there to get married first in a civil ceremony, then came up here and had a wedding here the same year later in the Catholic church. He's a Catholic, she's not Catholic, but they were married in a Catholic church in Moraga. They went back down to Peru. She's been there for three years now. I have two great-grandsons. So, that's the family there. My daughter, Barbara, was down there just this last couple of months. She stayed there for a month. It's very nice.

Barbara was a happily-married housewife for twenty-five years. After that period her husband's interests strayed, and affairs got so bad that she finally had to divorce him. She went through this upsetting experience at the same time that Linda, her daughter, was going blind. Finally, after about ten years of loneliness, she met and married Ralph Ostrom.

During that ten-year period she had an interesting job at the Faculty Club of the University at Berkeley. She was in charge of the room accommodations at the club, but in addition she conducted many of the social affairs that were given there. She was responsible for dinners and parties that faculty members gave. She became acquainted many of the fine faculty people, and enjoyed the association.

Now, after retirement, she is as happy as can be. It is, to me, very good to realize that she has become a very happy person in her own right. She and her husband have been doing a lot of travelling. Right now, last Monday, they left on a trip to Europe, and will visit, after a stay in London, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria, East Germany, and Yugoslavia.

Linda, my blind granddaughter, lived alone after she became blind. She didn't want to live with anybody because she wanted to be as independent as possible. Her blind dog was her only companion, but of course her family helped her with shopping, transportation, etc., as necessary.

My wife, Muriel, suffered a stroke in 1963 and lived partially paralyzed for the last fifteen years of her life. In spite of her condition we made three trips to Europe, totalling twelve months, with her only means of getting around consisting of a wheelchair. She passed away just after Christmas of 1979, after fifty-seven years of a very happy marriage. And I was very fortunate, almost immediately, to become acquainted with Helen



Saylor Sizer, of Rossmoor. She is in the upper echelon of pianists in the area, and we have been mutually pleased to have established a good relationship in our declining years.





## TAPE GUIDE -- Owen Pearce

Interview 1: April 11, 1990	1
tape 1, side A	1
tape 1, side B	12
Interview 2: May 8, 1990	19
tape 2, side A	19
tape 2, side B	29
tape 3, side A	42
Interview 3: May 17, 1990	45
tape 3, side A	45
Riess Interview: July 31, 1990	49
Interview 3: May 17, 1990	61
tape 3, side A	61
tape 3, side B	68
tape 4, side A	75



## APPENDICES

Bibliography	82
Horticultural Activities	83
Career of Owen Pearce	84
Biographical Outline	85



## INDEX - F. Owen Pearce

- Alameda County Floral Society, 21, 64  
 American Horticultural Society, 48  
 Arbegast, Mai, 39, 40  
 Baker, Herbert C., 48  
 Baker, Wakefield, 59  
 Bancroft, Ruth, 22  
 Beatty, Russ, 54  
 Bertelsman, Hans, 66  
 Bills, Ed, 48  
 Bills, Kay, 48, 52, 53  
 Blake, Anita Symmes [Mrs. Anson], 35, 36  
 Boutin, Frederick, 58  
 Bowman, Paul G., 27, 28  
 Brandt, Cora, 34, 46  
 Brown, Emily [Mrs. Hillyer], 47, 61  
 Brown, Peggy [Mrs. Cabot], 43, 44, 61  
 Bryan, John, 44  
 Brydon, Jock [Percy Haddon], 43, 44, 46, 47  
 Burr, Charlie, 41, 51  
 Butterfield, Harry, 21, 47  
 Caldis, Panos, 24  
 California School of Gardening for Women, 57  
California Horticultural Journal, 45-61  
 California Horticultural Society, 21, 32, 33, 43ff60  
 California Horticultural Society, Publications Committee, 45, 48, 52, 54  
 California Horticultural Society, Rixford Award, 58  
 California Native Plant Society, 40, 51, 52  
 California Nurserymen's Association, 41  
 Camellia Society, 50  
 Christian Science, 13, 14, 54, 55  
 Christensen, Jules, 41  
 Chrysanthemum Society, 22  
 Clarke, W.B., 51  
 Coe, Fred O., 48  
 Connelly, Elma, 64  
 Contra Costa Performing Arts Society, 74  
 Crawford, Hilary, 41  
 Croxton, Pauline, 25  
 Dailey, Gardner, 44  
 Dassonville, 67  
 Davey, Keith, 43  
 Domoto, Toichi, 51, 62  
 Dunsmuir House, East Oakland, 62, 63  
 Duveneck, Frank, 51  
 East Bay Garden Center, 62, 63  
 Eastwood, Alice, 37, 38, 50  
 Edwards, John Paul, 66  
 Eisenhour, Lloyd, 63  
 Evans, John Paul, 25, 28  
 Evans, Morgan, 47  
 Farwell, Everett, 23  
 Feathers, David, 23, 28, 61, 65  
 Fitzgerald, Gerry "Fitz", 10  
 Fletcher, Christine, 66, 67  
 Friends of Pacific Horticulture, 56  
 Friends of Tilden Botanic Garden, 39, 40  
 Gates, Jane, 34, 35, 45  
 Giauque, Professor and Mrs. William Francis, 12  
 Gibson, Abraham, 1  
 Gilkey Howard, 28, 47, 65  
 Gilkey Ruth, 63  
 Hall of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, 43  
 Hand, Harland, 49  
 Hawkins, Lester, 51, 57, 58  
 Hayakawa, Margedant, 49, 56



- Hays, William C., 11  
 Healy-Tibbetts Co., 14  
 Heidt, Horace, 74  
 Homans, Mrs. Robert, 44  
 Howard, John Galen, 10  
 Howell, John Thomas, 38, 50  
 Howell-North Press, 59  
 Hudson, Roy, 25, 44, 47, 58  
 Hutchison, Paul, 42  
 Hyman, Laurence, 49  
  
 Ingle, Barbara, 45  
  
 Japanese nurserymen, 51  
 Johnson, Lady Bird [Mrs. Lyndon B.],  
 61, 62  
Journal of the California  
Horticultural Society, 33, 45, 46  
  
 Kelsey, Ruth, 41, 42  
 Kerrigan, Howard, 24  
 Kipping, Ted, 24  
 Knoll, Elsa Uppman, 43, 55, 57  
  
 Lane, Mel, 55  
 Lane, Wally, 30  
 Laurie, Michael, 54  
 Leiser, Andy, 50  
 Lem, Halfdan, 23  
 Loorz, George, 17  
  
 Madden, Jim, 29, 30  
 Madison, Marshall, 42  
 Manor, Harold and Marjorie, 21, 27,  
 64  
 Mathias, Mildred, 50  
 McClintock, Elizabeth, 41, 42, 48,  
 61  
 McLaren, John, 32  
 Menzies Arthur, 47  
 Menzies Robert, 51  
 Mitchell, Sydney B., 21, 31-34, 45,  
 46, 48  
 Morgan, Julia, 17, 18  
 Mosher, Francis, 25  
 Mott, William Penn, 39, 40  
 Moulton, Jim, 24  
 Moyles, Bill, 24, 25  
 Napton, Jack, 54, 57  
  
 Oakland Business Men's Garden Club,  
 28, 65  
 Oakland Camera Club, 67  
 Oakland [California] Spring Garden  
 Show, 21, 28, 64, 65  
 Olbrich, Marshall, 51, 58  
 Ornduff, Robert, 47  
 Osborn, Hadley, 63  
 Osegueda, Jack, 24  
 Ostrom, Barbara Pearce [Mrs. Ralph],  
 75-78  
  
Pacific Horticulture, 48, 49  
 Pacific Horticulture Foundation, 45,  
 48, 55, 56, 60  
 Paige, Harold, 28  
 Parker, K. E., Co., Construction,  
 13-16  
 Parker, Kingsbury Eastman, 13, 14  
 Parker, Steffens and Pearce,  
 Construction Co., 16, 17  
 Pearce, May Gibson, 1-9, 54, 55, 73  
 Pearce, Muriel Castleman, 12, 13,  
 72, 78  
 Phillips, Charlie, 21, 28, 62, 65  
 photography, 66-69  
 Plummer, Harold "Red", 74  
 Pratt, Don, 46  
  
 Raabe, Robert, 47  
 Ratcliff, Robert W., and Evelyn, 16  
 Reinelt, Frank, 31, 32  
 Reiter, Victor, 31, 41, 43, 44, 48,  
 51, 56, 58, 61  
 Rhododendron Society (California  
 Chapter, American Rhododendron  
 Society), 22-25, 62, 63  
 Rock Garden Society (Western  
 Chapter, American Rock Garden  
 Society), 26  
 Roderick, Wayne, 26, 37, 39, 40, 53  
 Rollins Garden, Fitzhugh and Betty  
 Rollins, 52  
 Roof, Jim, 36-40  
 Roth, Lurline Matson, 61  
 Rowntree, Lester, 47





- San Francisco Business Men's Garden Club, 21, 22, 27-31, 37, 38, 68, 69
- San Francisco Photographic Society, 66
- Saxe, Bob, 27
- Schmidt, Billy, 45
- Schmidt, Marjorie, 51
- Scott, Geraldine Knight, 47
- Scudder, Bob, 31
- Sierra, 1914, 1918, 19, 69-73
- Sizer, Helen Saylor, 74
- Smith, Gladys, 61
- Southern California Horticultural Institute, 46, 60
- Spencer, Ted, and Jeanette Dyer
- Spencer, 18
- Spring, Jack, 31, 32, 61
- Stiefvater, Emil, 29
- Strybing Arboretum, 34
- Strybing Arboretum, Helen Crocker Russell Library, 34, 44
- Strybing Arboretum Society of Golden Gate Park, 41-45, 49, 59
- Strybing Arboretum Society, Docents Committee, 45
- Strybing Arboretum Society, F. Owen Pearce Award, 61, 62
- Sullivan, Peter, 47, 53, 63
- Sumner, Maurice and Frances, 22, 23 27, 62, 63
- Sunset Magazine, 21, 55
- Symmes, Mabel, 35
- Tilden Botanic Garden, East Bay Regional Parks, 36-40
- University of California, Department of Landscape Architecture, 54
- University of California, School of Architecture, 9
- Valen, Walden, 44
- Vetterle and Reinelt, Nursery, 31, 32
- Walther, Eric, 35, 36, 41, 44, 57
- Warner, Emily, 43, 44
- Waters, W. George, 48, 49, 56, 62
- Waters, Olive Rice [Mrs. George], 62
- Wayne, Linda, 76, 77
- Wayne, Nancy, 77
- Wertheim, Ernest, 45, 54
- West, James, 57
- Western Horticultural Society, 45, 60
- Western Hills Nursery. See Marshall Olbrich.
- Whalley, Ralph, 70
- Wieslander, Everett, 39, 40
- Williamson, Joe, 55
- Wilson, Albert, 29, 47, 48, 53
- Wilson, Carol Green [Mrs. G. O.], 38
- Wohlers, Mary, 40
- Wreden, Byra [Mrs. William], 43, 44



Lewis O. Lawyer

Born and raised in Alhambra, California. Received BS with honors at UC Berkeley in 1936. Worked as Plant Pathologist and Assistant Director of Research for Del Monte Corporation.

Currently active in Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris, American Iris Society, American Rock Garden Society, UC Botanical Garden, California Horticultural Society.

Maintains interests in gardening, music, water-color painting, photography, electronics and lapidary.

Adele S. Lawyer

Born and raised in San Francisco, California. Received BA in child development, minor in public speaking and psychology at UC Berkeley. Worked for Del Monte Corporation as a Plant Pathologist.

Membership in Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris, American Iris Society, American Rock Garden Society, and California Horticultural Society.

Other activities include gardening, music, writing, photography, child development, and cooking.



Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Graduated from Goucher College, B.A. in English, 1957.  
Post-graduate work, University of London and the University of California, Berkeley, in English and history of art.

Feature writing and assistant woman's page editor, Globe-Times, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.  
Volunteer work on starting a new Berkeley newspaper.  
Natural science docent at the Oakland Museum.  
Free-lance Photographer.

Editor in the Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art, environmental design, social and cultural history, horticulture, journalism, photography, Berkeley and University history.



















BANC MSS  
92/65 C



